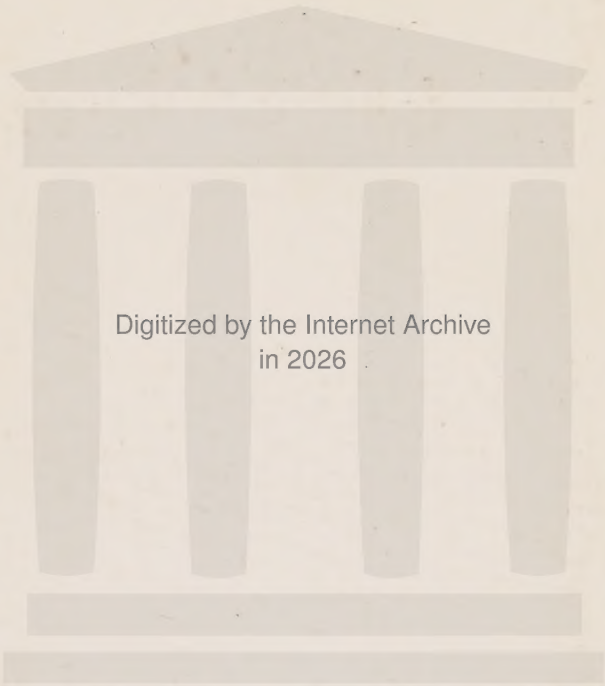
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/sermonspreachedi0000alex_s0a9

SERMONS PREACHED IN MANCHESTER

THIRD SERIES

SERMONS PREACHED IN MANCHESTER by Alexander Maclaren D.D.

Third Series

NEW YORK
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
30 LAFAYETTE PLACE
1902

SERMON PAGE

XV. ETERNITY IN THE HEART 220

XVI. MAN'S BLESSEDNESS AND GOD'S PRAISE . . . 238

XVII. PRIDE OVERCOMING WANT 255

XVIII. A PATTERN OF PRAYER 273

XIX. THE TOILING CHRIST 291

XX. CONSIDER CHRIST 307

XXI. THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE 325

XXII. SOLDIER PRIESTS 343

XXIII. WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION 361

XXIV. NEAREST TO CHRIST 376

SERMONS

SERMON I.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 Cor. vii. 24.

Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

YOU find that three times within the compass of a very few verses this injunction is repeated. "As God hath distributed to every man," says the Apostle in the 17th verse, "as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." Then again, in the 20th verse, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called." And then finally in our text.

The reason for this emphatic reiteration is not difficult to ascertain. There were strong temptations to restlessness besetting the early Christians. The great change from heathenism to Christianity would seem to loosen the joints of all life, and having been swept from their anchorage in religion, all external things would appear to be adrift. It was most natural that a man should seek to alter even the circumstances of his outward life, when such a revolution had separated him from his ancient self.

Hence would tend to come the rupture of family ties, the separation of husband and wife, the Jewish convert seeking to become like a Gentile, the Gentile seeking to become like a Jew; the slave trying to be free, the freeman, in some paroxysm of disgust at his former condition, trying to become a slave. These three cases are all referred to in the context—marriage, circumcision, slavery. And for all three the Apostle has the same advice to give—stop where you are. In whatever condition you were when God's invitation drew you to Himself—for that, and not being set to a "vocation" in life, is the meaning of the word "called" here—remain in it.

And then, on the other hand, there was every reason why the Apostle and his co-workers should set themselves, by all means in their power, to oppose this restlessness. For, if Christianity in those early days had once degenerated into the mere instrument of social revolution, its development would have been thrown back for centuries, and the whole worth and power of it, for those who first apprehended it, would have been lost. So you know Paul never said a word to encourage any precipitate attempts to change externals. He let slavery—he let war alone; he let the tyranny of the Roman empire alone—not because he was a coward, not because he thought these things were not worth meddling with, but because he, like all wise men, believed in making the tree good and then its fruit good. He believed in the diffusion of the principles which he proclaimed, and the mighty name which he served, as able to girdle the

poison-tree, and to take the bark off it, and the rest—the slow dying—might be left to the work of time. And the same general idea underlies the words of my text. Do not try, he says, do not trouble yourselves about external circumstances; keep to your Christian profession; let those alone, they will right themselves. Art thou a slave? Seek not to be freed. Art thou circumcised? Seek not to be uncircumcised. Get hold of the central, vivifying, transmuting influence, and all the rest is a question of time. But, besides this more especial application of the words of my text to the primitive times, it carries with it, dear brethren, a large general principle that applies to all—a principle, I may say, dead in the teeth of the maxims upon which life is being ordered by the most of us. *Our* maxim is, "Get on!" Paul's is, "Never mind about getting *on*, get *up!*" Our notion is—"try to make the circumstances what I would like to have them." Paul's is—"leave circumstances to take care of themselves, or rather leave God to take care of the circumstances. You get close to Him, and hold His hand, and everything else will right itself." Only he is not preaching stolid acquiescence. His previous injunctions were—"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." He sees that that may be misconceived and abused, and so, in his third reiteration of the precept, he puts in a word which throws a flood of light upon the whole thing:—"Let every man wherein he is called therein abide." Yes, but that is not all—"therein abide *with God!*" Aye, that is it! not an impossible stoicism; not hypocritical, fanatical contempt of the external. But whilst

that gets its due force and weight, whilst a man yields himself in a measure to the natural tastes and inclinations which God has given him, and with the intention that he should find there subordinate guidance and impulse for his life, still let him abide where he is called with God, and seek to increase his fellowship with Him, as the main thing that he has to do.

I. Thus we are led from the words before us first to the thought that *our chief effort in life ought to be union with God.*

"Abide with God," which, being put into other words, means, I think, mainly two things—constant communion, the occupation of all our nature with Him, and, consequently, the recognition of His will in all circumstances.

As to the former, we have the mind and heart and will of God revealed to us for the light, the love, the obedience of our will and heart and mind; and our Apostle's precept is, first, that we should try, moment by moment, in all the bustle and stir of our daily life, to have our whole being consciously directed to and engaged with, fertilized, and calmed by contact with the perfect and infinite nature of our Father in heaven.

As we go to our work to-morrow morning again, what difference would obedience to this precept make upon my life and yours? Before all else, and in the midst of all else, we should think of that Divine Mind that in the heavens is waiting to illumine our darkness; we should feel the glow of that uncreated and perfect Love, which, in the midst of change and treachery, of coldness and of

"greetings where no kindness is," in the midst of masterful authority and unloving command, is ready to fill our hearts with tenderness and tranquillity: we should bow before that Will which is absolute and supreme indeed, but neither arbitrary nor harsh, which is "the eternal purpose that He hath purposed in Himself" indeed, but is also "the good pleasure of His goodness and the counsel of His grace."

And with such a God near to us ever in our faithful thoughts, in our thankful love, in our lowly obedience, with such a mind revealing itself to us, and such a heart opening its hidden storehouses for us as we approach, like some star that, as one gets nearer to it, expands its disc and glows into rich colour, where at a distance was but pallid silver, and such a will sovereign above all, energizing, even through opposition, and making obedience a delight, what room, brethren, would there be in our lives for agitations, and distractions, and regrets, and cares, and fears—what room for earthly hopes or for sad remembrances? They die in the fruition of a present God all-sufficient for mind, and heart, and will—even as the sun when it is risen with a burning heat may scorch and wither the weeds that grow about the base of the fruitful tree whose deeper roots are but warmed by the rays that ripen the rich clusters which it bears. "Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide *with God*."

And then, as a consequence of such an occupation of the whole being with God, there will follow that second element which is included in the precept, namely, the recognition of God's will as operating in and determining all

circumstances. When our whole soul is occupied with Him, we shall see Him everywhere. And this ought to be our honest effort—to connect everything which befalls ourselves and the world with Him. We should see that Omnipotent Will, the silent energy which flows through all being, asserting itself through all secondary causes, marching on towards its destined and certain goal amidst all the whirl and perturbation of events, bending even the antagonism of rebels and the unconsciousness of godless men, as well as the play of material instruments, to its own purposes, and swinging and swaying the whole set and motion of things according to its own impulse and by the touch of its own fingers.

Such a faith does not require us to overlook the visible occasions for the things which befall us, nor to deny the stable laws according to which that mighty will operates in men's lives. Secondary causes? Yes. Men's opposition and crime? Yes. Our own follies and sins? No doubt. Blessings and sorrows falling indiscriminately on a whole community or a whole world? Certainly. And yet the visible agents are not the sources, but only the vehicles of the power, the belting and shafting which transmit a mighty impulse which they had nothing to do in creating. And the antagonism subserves the purposes of the rule which it opposes, as the blow of the surf may consolidate the sea-wall it breaks against. And our own follies and sins may indeed sorrowfully shadow our lives, and bring on us pains of body and disasters in fortune, and stings in spirit which we alone are responsible for, and which we have no right to regard as inscrutable

judgments—yet even these bitter plants of which our own hands have sowed the seed, spring by His merciful will, and *are* to be regarded as His loving, fatherly chastisements—sent before to warn us by a premonitory experience that "the wages of sin is death." As a rule, God does not interpose to pick a man out of the mud into which he has been plunged by his own faults and follies, until he has learned the lessons which he can find in plenty down in the slough, if he will only look for them! And the fact that some great calamity or some great joy affects a wide circle of people, does not make its having a special lesson and meaning for each of them at all doubtful. *There* is one of the great depths of all moving wisdom and providence, that by the very self-same act it is in one aspect universal, and in another special and individual. The ordinary notion of a special providence goes perilously near the belief that God's will is less concerned in some parts of a man's life than in others. It is very much like desecrating and secularizing a whole land by the very act of focussing the sanctity in some single consecrated shrine. But the true belief is that the whole sweep of a life is under the will of God, and that when, for instance, war ravages a nation, though the sufferers be involved in a common ruin occasioned by murderous ambition and measureless pride, yet for each of the sufferers the common disaster has a special message. Let us believe in a Divine will which regards each individual caught up in the skirts of the horrible storm even as it regards each individual on whom the equal rays of His universal sunshine fall. Let us believe that every single

soul has a place in the heart, and is taken into account in the purposes of Him who moves the tempest, and makes His sun to shine upon the unthankful and on the good. Let us, in accordance with the counsel of the Apostle here, first of all try to anchor and rest our own souls fast and firm in God all the day long, that, grasping His hand, we may look out upon all the confused dance of fleeting circumstances and say, "Thy will is done on earth"—if not yet "as it is done in heaven"—still done in the issues and events of all—and done with my cheerful obedience and thankful acceptance of its commands and allotments in my own life.

II. The second idea which comes out of these words is this—*Such union with God will lead to contented continuance in our place, whatever it be.*

Our text is as if Paul had said, You have been "called" in such and such worldly circumstances. The fact proves that these circumstances do not obstruct the highest and richest blessings. The light of God can shine on your souls through them. Since then you have such sacred memorials associated with them, and know by experience that fellowship with God is possible in them, do you remain where you are, and keep hold of the God who has visited you in them.

If once, in accordance with the thoughts already suggested, our minds have, by God's help, been brought into something like real, living fellowship with Him, and we have attained the wisdom that pierces through the external to the Almighty will that underlies all its mazy whirl, then why should we care about shifting our place? Why

should we trouble ourselves about altering these varying events, since each in its turn is a manifestation of His mind and will; each in its turn is a means of discipline for us; and through all their variety a single purpose works, which tends to a single end—"that we should be partakers of His holiness."

And that is the one point of view from which we can bear to look upon the world and not be utterly bewildered and over-mastered by it. Calmness and central peace are ours; a true appreciation of all outward good and a charm against the bitterest sting of outward evils are ours; a patient continuance in the place where He has set us is ours—when by fellowship with Him we have learned to look upon our work as primarily doing His will, and upon all our possessions and conditions primarily as means for making us like Himself. Most men seem to think that they have gone to the very bottom of the thing when they have classified the gifts of fortune as good or evil, according as they produce pleasure or pain. But that is a poor, superficial classification. It is like taking and arranging books by their bindings and flowers by their colours. Instead of saying, We divide life into two halves, and we put there all the joyful, and here all the sad, for that is the ruling distinction—let us rather say, The whole is one, because it all comes from one purpose, and it all tends towards one end. The only question worth asking in regard to the externals of our life is—how far does each thing help me to be a good man? How far does it open my understanding to apprehend Him? How far does it make my spirit pliable and plastic under His touch? How

far does it make me capable of larger reception of greater gifts from Himself? What is its effect in preparing me for that world beyond? Is there any other greater, more satisfying, more majestic thought of life than this—the scaffolding by which souls are built up into the temple of God! And to care whether a thing is painful or pleasant is as absurd as to care whether the bricklayer's trowel is knocking the sharp corner off a brick, or plastering mortar on the one below it before he lays it carefully on its course. Is the *building* getting on? That is the one question that is worth thinking about.

You and I write our lives as if on one of those manifold writers which you use. A thin filmy sheet *here*, a bit of black paper below it; but the writing goes through upon the next page, and when the blackness that divides two worlds is swept away *there*, the history of each life written by ourselves remains legible in eternity. And the question is—What sort of autobiography are we writing for the revelation of that day, and how far do our circumstances help us to transcribe fair in our lives the will of our God and the image of our Redeemer?

If, then, we have once got hold of that principle that all which is—summer and winter, storm and sunshine, possession and loss, memory and hope, work and rest, and all the other antitheses of life—is equally the product of His will, equally the manifestation of His mind, equally His means for our discipline, then we have the amulet and talisman which will preserve us from the fever of desire and the shivering fits of anxiety as to things which perish. And, as they tell of a Christian father

who, riding by one of the great lakes of Switzerland all day long, on his journey to the Church Council that was absorbing his thoughts, said towards evening to the deacon who was pacing beside him, "Where is the lake?" so you and I, journeying along by the margin of this great flood of things when wild storms sweep across it, or when the sunbeams glint upon its blue waters "and birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave," shall be careless of the changeful sea, if the eye looks beyond the visible and beholds the unseen, the unchanging real presences that make glory in the darkest lives, and "sunshine in the shady place." "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

III. Still further, another thought may be suggested from these words, or rather from the connection in which they occur, and that is—*Such contented continuance in our place is the dictate of the truest wisdom.*

There are two or three collateral topics, partly suggested by the various connections in which this commandment occurs in the chapter, from which I draw the few remarks I have to make now.

And the first point I would suggest is that very old commonplace one, so often forgotten, that after all, though you may change about as much as you like, there is a pretty substantial equipoise and identity in the amount of pain and pleasure in all external conditions. The total length of day and night all the year round is the same at the North Pole and at the Equator—half and half. Only, in the one place, it is half and half for four-and-twenty hours at a time, and in the other, the night

lasts through gloomy months of winter, and the day is bright for unbroken weeks of summer. But, when you come to add them up at the year's end, the man that shivers in the ice, and the man that pants beneath the beams from the zenith, have had the same length of sunshine and of darkness. It does not matter much at what degrees between the Equator and the Pole you and I live; when the thing comes to be made up we shall be all pretty much upon an equality. You do not get the happiness of the rich man over the poor one by multiplying twenty shillings a week by as many figures as will suffice to make it up to £10,000 a year. What is the use of such eager desires to change our condition, when every condition has disadvantages attending its advantages as certainly as a shadow; and when all have pretty nearly the same quantity of the raw material of pain and pleasure, and when the amount of either actually experienced by us depends not on where we are, but on *what* we are?

Then, still further, there is another consideration to be kept in mind upon which I do not enlarge, as what I have already said involves it—namely, whilst the portion of external pain and pleasure summed up comes pretty much to the same in everybody's life, any condition may yield the fruit of devout fellowship with God.

Another very remarkable idea suggested by a part of the context is—What is the need for my troubling myself about outward changes when *in Christ* I can get all the peculiarities which make any given position desirable to me? For instance, hear how Paul talks

to slaves wanting to be set free: "For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant." If you generalize that principle it comes to this, that in union with Jesus Christ we possess, by our fellowship with Him, the peculiar excellencies and blessings that are derivable from external relations of every sort. To take concrete examples—if a man is a slave, he may be free in Christ. If free, he may have the joy of utter submission to an absolute master in Christ. If you and I are lonely, we may feel all the delights of society by union with Him. If surrounded and distracted by companionship, and seeking for seclusion, we may get all the peace of perfect privacy in fellowship with Him. If we are rich, and sometimes think that we were in a position of less temptation if we were poorer, we may find all the blessings for which we sometimes covet poverty in communion with Him. If we are poor, and fancy that, if we had a little more just to lift us above the grinding, carking care of to-day and the anxiety of to-morrow, we should be happier, we may find all tranquillity in Him. And so you may run through all the variety of human conditions, and say to yourself—What is the use of looking for blessings flowing from them from without? Enough for us if we grasp that Lord who is all in all, and will give us in peace the joy of conflict, in conflict the calm of peace, in health the refinement of sickness, in sickness the vigour and glow of health, in memory the brightness of undying hope, in hope the calming of holy memory, in wealth the lowliness of

poverty, in poverty the ease of wealth; in life and in death being all and more than all that dazzles us by the false gleam of created brightness!

And so, finally—a remark which has no connection with the text itself, but which I cannot avoid inserting here—I want you to think, and think seriously, of the antagonism and diametrical opposition between these principles of my text and the maxims current in the world, and nowhere more so than in this city. Our text is a revolutionary one. It is dead against the watch-words that you fathers give your children—"push," "energy," "advancement," "get on, whatever you do." You have made a philosophy of it, and you say that this restless discontent with a man's present position and eager desire to get a little farther ahead in the scramble—that that underlies much modern civilization and progress, and leads to the diffusion of wealth and to employment for the working classes, and to mechanical inventions, and domestic comforts, and I don't know what besides. You have made a religion of it; and it is thought to be blasphemy for a man to stand up and say—"It is idolatry!" My dear brethren, I declare I solemnly believe that, if I were to go on to the Manchester Exchange, next Tuesday, and stand up and say—"There is no God," I should not be thought half such a fool as if I were to go and say—"Poverty is not an evil *per se*, and men do not come into this world to get *on* but to get *up*—nearer and liker to God." If you, by God's grace, lay hold of this principle of my text, and honestly resolve to work it out, trusting in that dear

Lord who "though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor," in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, you will have to make up your minds to let the big prizes of your trade go into other people's hands and be contented to say—"I live by peaceful, high, pure, Christ-like thoughts." "He that needs least," said an old heathen, "is nearest the gods;" but I would rather modify the statement into, "He that needs most, and knows it, is nearest the gods." For surely Christ is more than mammon; and a spirit nourished by calm desires and holy thoughts into growing virtues and increasing Christ-likeness is better than circumstances ordered to our will, in the whirl of which we have lost our God. "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God and God of peace shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

SERMON II.

THE BITTERNESS AND BLESSEDNESS OF THE BREVITY OF LIFE.

PSALM xxxix, 6, 12.

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew. . . . I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

THESE two sayings are two different ways of putting the same thing. There is a common thought underlying both, but the associations with which that common thought is connected in these two verses are distinctly different. The one is bitter and sad—a gloomy half truth. The other, out of the very same fact, draws blessedness and hope. The one may come from no higher point of view than the level of worldly experience; the other is a truth of faith. The former is at best partial, and without the other may be harmful; the latter completes, explains, and hallows it.

And that this progress and variety in the thought is the key to the whole psalm is, I think, obvious to any one who will examine it with care. I cannot here enter on that task but in the hastiest fashion, by way of vindicating the connection which I trace between the two

verses of our text. The psalmist begins, then, with telling how at some time recently passed—in consequence of personal calamity not very clearly defined, but apparently some bodily sickness aggravated by mental sorrow and anxiety—he was struck dumb with silence, so that he held his peace even from good. In that state there rose within him many sad and miserable thoughts, which at last force their way through his locked lips. They shape themselves into a prayer, which is more complaint than petition—and which is absorbed in the contemplation of the manifest melancholy facts of human life,—"Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee." And then, as that thought dilates and sinks deeper into his soul, he looks out upon the whole race of man—and, in tones of bitterness and hopelessness, affirms that all are vanity, shadows, disquieted in vain. The blank hopelessness of such a view brings him to a standstill. It is true—but taken alone is too dreadful to think of. "That way madness lies,"—so he breaks short off his almost despairing thoughts, and with a swift turning away of his mind from the downward gaze into blackness that was beginning to make him reel, he fixes his eyes on the throne above—"And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." These words form the turning point of the psalm. After them, the former thoughts are repeated, but with what a difference—made by looking at all the blackness and sorrow, both personal and universal, in the bright light of that hope which streams upon the most lurid masses of opaque cloud, till their gloom begins to glow with an

inward lustre, and softens into solemn purples and reds. He had said, "I was dumb with silence—even from good." But when his hope is in God, the silence changes its character and becomes resignation and submission. "I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." The variety of human life and its transiency is not less plainly seen than before; but in the light of that hope it is regarded in reference to God's paternal correction, and is seen to be the consequence, not of a defect in His creative wisdom or love, but of man's sin. "Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity." That, to him who waits on the Lord, is the reason and the alleviation of the reiterated conviction "every man is vanity." Not any more does he say every man "at his best state," or, as it might be more accurately expressed, "even when most firmly established,"—for the man who is established in the Lord is not vanity, but only the man who founds his being on the fleeting present. Then, things being so, life being thus in itself and apart from God so fleeting and so sad, and yet a hope that brightens it like sunshine through an April shower—the psalmist rises to prayer, in which that formerly expressed conviction of the brevity of life is reiterated, with the addition of two words which changes its whole aspect, "I am a stranger *with Thee*." He is God's guest in his transient life. It is short, like the stay of a foreigner in a strange land; but he is under the care of the King of the Land—therefore he need not fear nor sorrow. Past generations, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose names God "is not ashamed" to appeal to in His own solemn designation of Himself—have held the

same relation, and their experience has sealed His faithful care of those who dwell with Him. Therefore, the sadness is soothed, and the vain and fleeting life of earth assumes a new appearance—and the most blessed and wisest issue of our consciousness of frailty and insufficiency is the fixing of our desires and hopes on Him in whose house we may dwell even while we wander to and fro, and in whom our life being rooted and established shall not be vain, howsoever it may be brief.

If, then, we follow the course of contemplation thus traced in the psalm, we have these three points brought before us—first, the thought of life common to both clauses; second, the gloomy, aimless hollowness which that thought breathes into life apart from God; third, the blessedness which springs from the same thought when we look at it in connection with our Father in heaven.

I. Observe the very forcible expression which is given here to *the thought of life common to both verses.*

"Every man walketh in a vain show." The original is even more striking and strong. And although one does not like altering words so familiar as those of our translation, which have sacredness from association and a melancholy music in their rhythm—still it is worth while to note that the force of the expression which the psalmist employs is correctly given in the margin, "in an image" —or "in a shadow." The phrase sounds singular to us, but is an instance of a common enough Hebrew idiom, and is equivalent to saying—he walks in the character or likeness of a shadow, or, as we should say, he walks as a shadow.

That is to say, the whole outward life and activity of every man is represented as fleeting and unsubstantial, like the reflection of a cloud which darkens leagues of the mountain's side in a moment, and "ere a man can say, behold," is gone again for ever.

Then, look at the other image employed in the other clause of our text to express the same idea, "I am a stranger and a sojourner, as all my fathers." The phrase has a history. In that most pathetic narrative of an old-world sorrow long since calmed and consoled, when "Abraham stood up from before his dead," and craved a burying-place for his Sarah from the sons of Heth, his first plea was, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." In his lips it was no metaphor. He was a stranger, a visitor for a brief time to an alien land; he was a sojourner, having no rights of inheritance, but settled among them for a while, and, though dwelling among them, not adopted into their community. He was a foreigner, not naturalized. And such is our relation to all this visible frame of things in which we dwell. It is alien to us; though we be in it, our true affinities are elsewhere; though we be in it, our stay is brief, as that of "a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night."

And there is given in the context still another metaphor setting forth the same fact in that dreary generalization which precedes my text, "Every man at his best state" —or as the word means, "established,"—with his roots most firmly struck in the material and visible—"is only a breath." It appears for a moment, curling from lip and nostril into the cold morning air, and vanishes away. So

then, vaporous, filmy is the seeming solid fact of the most stable life.

These have been the commonplaces of poets and rhetoricians and moralists in all time. But threadbare as the thought is, I may venture to dwell on it for a moment. I know I am only repeating what we all believe—and all forget. It is never too late to preach commonplaces, until everybody acts on them as well as admits them—and this old familiar truth has not yet got so wrought into the structure of our lives that we can afford to say no more about it.

"Surely every man walketh in a shadow." Did you ever stand upon the shore on some day of that "uncertain weather, when gloom and glory meet together," and notice how swiftly there went, racing over miles of billows, a darkening that quenched all the play of colour in the waves, as if all suddenly the angel of the waters had spread his broad wings between sun and sea, and then how in another moment as swiftly it flits away, and with a burst the light blazes out again, and leagues of ocean flash into green and violet and blue. So fleeting, so utterly perishable are our lives for all their seeming solid permanency. "Shadows in a career," as George Herbert has it—breath going out of the nostrils. We think of ourselves as ever to continue in our present posture. We are deceived by illusions. Mental indolence, a secret dislike of the thought, and the impostures of sense, all conspire to make us blind to, or at least oblivious of, the plain fact which every beat of our pulses might preach, and the slow creeping hands of every parish clock con-

firm. How awful that silent, unceasing footfall of receding days is when once we begin to watch it! Inexorable, passionless—though hope and fear may pray, "Sun, stand thou still on Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon,"—the tramp of the hours goes on. The poets paint them as a linked chorus of rosy forms, garlanded and clasping hands as they dance onwards. So they may be to some of us at some moments. So they may seem as they approach; but those who come hold the hands of those who go, and that troop has no rosy light upon their limbs, their garlands are faded, the sunshine falls not upon the grey and shrouded shapes, as they steal ghostlike through the gloom—and ever and ever the bright and laughing sisters pass on into that funereal band which grows and moves away from us unceasing. Alas! for many of us it bears away with it our lost treasures, our battered hopes, our joys, from which all the bright petals have dropped! Alas! for many of us there is nothing but sorrow in watching how all things become "part and parcel of the dreadful past."

And how strangely sometimes even a material association may give new emphasis to that old threadbare truth. Some more permanent *thing* may help us to feel more profoundly the shadowy fleetness of *man*. The trifles are so much more lasting than their owners. Or, as "the preacher" puts it, with such wailing pathos, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever." This material is perishable—but yet how much more enduring than we are!

The pavements we walk upon, the coals in our grates —how many millenniums old are they? The pebble you kick aside with your foot—how many generations will it outlast? Go into a museum and you will see hanging there, little the worse for centuries, battered shields, notched swords, and gaping helmets—aye, but what has become of the bright eyes that once flashed the light of battle through the bars, what has become of the strong hands that once gripped the hilts? "The knights are dust," and "their good swords are" *not* "rust." The material lasts after its owner. Seed corn is found in a mummy case. The poor form beneath the painted lid is brown and hard, and more than half of it gone to pungent powder, and the man that once lived has faded utterly: but the handful of seed has its mysterious life in it, and when it is sown, in due time the green blade pushes above English soil, as it would have done under the shadow of the pyramids four thousand years ago—and its produce waves in a hundred harvest fields to-day. The money in your purses now, will some of it bear the head of a king that died half a century ago. It is bright and useful—where are all the people that in turn said they "owned" it? Other men will live in our houses, will preach from this pulpit, and sit in these pews when you and I are far away. And other June days will come, and the old rose-trees will flower round houses where unborn men will then be living, when the present possessor is gone to nourish the roots of the roses in the graveyard!

"Our days are as a shadow, and there is none abiding."

So said David on other occasions. We know, dear brethren, how true it is, whether we consider the ceaseless flux and change of things, the mystic march of the silent-footed hours, or the greater permanence which attaches to the "things which perish," than to our abode among them. We know it, and yet how hard it is not to yield to the inducement to act and feel as if all this painted scenery were solid rock and mountain. By our own inconsiderateness and sensuousness, we live in a lie, in a false dream of permanence, and so in a sadder sense we walk in "a vain shew,"—deluding ourselves with the conceit of durability, and refusing to see that the apparent is the shadowy, and the one enduring reality God. It is hard to get even the general conviction vivified in men's minds, hardest of all to get any man to reflect upon it as applying to himself. Do not think that you have said enough to vindicate neglect of my words now, when you call them commonplace. So they are. But did you ever take that well worn old story, and press it on your own consciousness—as a man might press a common little plant, whose juice is healing, against his dim eye-ball—by saying to yourself, "It is true of *me*. *I* walk as a shadow. *I* am gliding onwards to my doom. Through *my* slack hands the golden sands are flowing, and soon *my* hour-glass will run out, and *I* shall have to stop and go away." Let me beseech you for one half hour's meditation on that fact before this day closes. You will forget my words then, when with your own eyes you have looked upon that truth, and felt that it is not merely a toothless commonplace, but belongs to and works in *Thy*

life,—as it ebbs away silently and incessantly from *Thee.*

II. Let me point, in the second place, to the gloomy aimless *hollowness which that thought, apart from God, infuses into life.*

There is, no doubt, a double idea in the metaphor which the psalmist employs. He desires to set forth, by his image of a shadow, not only the transiency, but the unsubstantialness of life. Shadow is opposed to substance, to that which is real, as well as that which is enduring. And we may further say that the one of these characteristics is in great part the occasion of the other. Because life is fleeting, therefore, in part, it is so hollow and unsatisfying. The fact that men are dragged away from their pursuits so inexorably makes these pursuits seem, to any one who cannot see beyond that fact, trivial and not worth the doing. Why should we fret and toil and break our hearts, "and scorn delights, and live laborious days" for purposes which will last so short a time, and things which we shall so soon have to leave? What is all the bustle and business, when the sad light of that thought falls on it, but "labouring for the wind"? "Were it not better to lie still?" Such thoughts have at least a partial truth in them, and are difficult to meet as long as we think only of the facts and results of man's life that we can see with our eyes. And our psalm gives emphatic utterance to them. The word rendered "walketh" in our text is not merely a synonym for passing through life, but has a very striking meaning. It is an intensive frequentative form of the word—that is, it represents the

action as being repeated over and over again. For instance, it might be used to describe the restless motion of a wild beast in a cage, raging from side to side, never still, and never getting any farther for all the racing backward and forward. So here it signifies "walketh to and fro," and implies hurry and bustle, continuous effort, habitual unrest. It thus comes to be parallel with the stronger words which follow—"Surely they are *disquieted* in vain;" and one reason why all this effort and agitation are purposeless and sad, is because the man who is straining his nerves and wearying his legs is but a shadow in duration—"He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them."

Yes! if we have said all, when we have said, men pass as a fleeting shadow—if my life has no roots in the Eternal, nor any consciousness of a life that does not pass, and a light that never perishes—if it is derived from, directed to, "cribbed, cabined, and confined" within this visible diurnal sphere—then it is all flat and unprofitable, an illusion while it seems to last, and all its pursuits are folly, its hopes dreams, its substances vapours, its years a lie. For, if life be thus short, I who live it am conscious of, and possess whether I be conscious of them or no, capacities and requirements which, though they were to be annihilated to-morrow, could be satisfied while they lasted by nothing short of the absolute ideal, the all-perfect, the infinite—or, to put away abstractions, "My soul thirsteth for God, the living God!" "He hath put eternity in their heart," as the book of Ecclesiastes says. Longings and aspirations, weaknesses and woes, the limits

of creature helps and loves, the disproportion between us and the objects around us—all these facts of familiar experience do witness, alike by blank misgivings and by bright hopes, by many disappointments and by indestructible expectations surviving them all, that nothing which has a date, a beginning, or an end, can fill our souls or give us rest. Can you fill up the swamps of the Mississippi with any cart loads of faggots you can fling in? Can you fill your souls with anything which belongs to this fleeting life? Has a flying shadow an appreciable thickness, or will a million of them pressed together occupy a space in your empty, hungry heart?

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with a message which may sound gloomy, and beseech you to give heed to it. No matter how you may get on in the world—though you may fulfil every dream with which you began in your youth—you will certainly find that without Christ for your brother and saviour, God for your friend, and heaven for your hope, life, with all its fulness, is empty. It lasts long, too long as it sometimes seems for work, too long for hope, too long for endurance; long enough to make love die, and joys wither and fade, and companions drop away, but without God and Christ, you will find it but as a watch in the night. At no moment through the long weary years will it satisfy your whole being; and when the weary years are all past it will seem to have been but as one troubled moment breaking the eternal silence. At every point *so* profitless, and all the points making so thin and short a line! The crested waves seem heaped together as they recede from the eye till they reach the

horizon, where miles of storm are seen but as a line of spray. So when a man looks back upon his life, if it have been a godless one, be sure of this, that it will be a dark and cheerless retrospect over a tossing waste, with a white rim of wandering barren foam vexed by tempest, and then, if not before, he will sadly learn how he has been living amidst shadows, and, with a nature that needs God, has wasted himself upon the world. "O life, as futile then as frail." "Surely," in such a case, "every man walketh in a vain shew."

III. But note, finally, how our other text in its significant words gives us *The Blessedness which springs from this same thought of life when it is looked at in connection with God.*

The mere conviction of the brevity and hollowness of life is not in itself a religious or a helpful thought. Its power depends upon the other ideas which are associated with it. It is susceptible of the most opposite applications, and may tend to impel conduct in exactly opposite directions. It may be the language of despair or of bright hope. It may be the bitter creed of a worn-out debauchee, who has wasted his life in hunting shadows, and is left with a cynical spirit and a bitter tongue. It may be the passionless belief of a retired student, or the fanatical faith of a religious ascetic. It may be an argument for sensuous excess, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"; or it may be the stimulus for noble and holy living, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh." The connection in which it is held determines whether it shall be a blight or a blessing to a man.

And the one addition which is needed to incline the whole weight of that conviction to the better side, and to light up all its blackness, is that little phrase in this text, "I am a stranger *with Thee*, and a sojourner." There seems to be an allusion here to the remarkable words connected with the singular Jewish institution of the Jubilee. You remember that by the Mosaic law, there was no absolute sale of land in Israel, but that every half century the whole returned to the descendants of the original occupiers. Important economical and social purposes were contemplated in this arrangement, as well as the preservation of the relative position of the tribes as settled at the conquest. But the law itself assigns a purely religious purpose—the preservation of the distinct consciousness of the tenure on which the people held their territory, namely, obedience to and dependence on God. "The land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is mine, for ye are *strangers and sojourners with me*." Of course, there was a special sense in which that was true with regard to Israel, but David thought that the words were as true in regard to his whole relation of God, as in regard to Israel's possession of its national inheritance.

If we grasp these words as completing all that we have already said, how different this transient and unsubstantial life looks. You must have the light from both sides to stereoscope and make solid the flat surface picture. Transient! yes—but it is passed in the presence of God. Whether we know it or no, our brief days hang upon Him, and we walk, all of us, in the light of His counten-

ance. That makes the transient eternal, the shadowy substantial, the trivial heavy with solemn meaning and awful yet vast possibilities. "In our embers is something that doth live." If we had said all, when we say "We are as a shadow," it would matter very little, though even then it *would* matter something, how we spent our shadowy days; but if these poor brief hours are spent in the great "Taskmaster's eye,"—if the shadow cast on earth proclaims a light in the heavens—if from this point there hangs an unending chain of conscious being—oh, then, with what awful solemnity is the brevity, with what tremendous magnitude is the minuteness, of our earthly days invested! "With Thee"—then I am constantly in the presence of a sovereign Law and its Giver; "with Thee"—then all my actions are registered and weighed yonder; "with Thee"—then "Thou, God, seest me." Brethren, it is the prismatic halo and ring of eternity round this poor glass of time that gives it all its dignity, all its meaning. The lives that are lived before God cannot be trifles.

And if this relation to time be recognised and accepted and held fast by our hearts and minds, then what calm blessedness will flow into our souls!

"A stranger with Thee,"—then we are the guests of the King. The Lord of the land charges Himself with our protection and provision; we journey under His safe conduct. It is for His honour and faithfulness that no harm shall come to us travelling in His territory, and relying on His word. Like Abraham with the sons of Heth, we may claim the protection and help which a stranger

needs. He recognises the bond and will fulfil it. We have eaten of His salt, and He will answer for our safety. —"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye."

"A stranger with Thee,"—then we have a constant companion and an abiding presence. We may be solitary and necessarily remote from the polity of the land. We may feel amid all the visible things of earth as if foreigners. We may not have a foot of soil, not even a grave for our dead. Companionships may dissolve and warm hands grow cold and their close clasp relax—what then? He is with us still. He will join us as we journey, even when our hearts are sore with loss. He will walk with us by the way, and make our chill hearts glow. He will sit with us at the table—however humble the meal, and He will not leave us when we discern Him. Strangers we are indeed here—but not solitary, for we are "strangers with Thee." As in some ancestral home in which a family has lived for centuries—son after father has rested in these great chambers, and been safe behind the strong walls—so, age after age, they who love Him abide in God.—"Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations."

"Strangers with Thee,"—then we may carry our thoughts forward to the time when we shall go to our true home, nor wander any longer in the land that is not ours. If even here we come into such blessed relationship with God, that fact is in itself a prophecy of a more perfect communion and a heavenly house. They who are strangers with Him will one day be at "home with the Lord." And in the light of that blessed hope the

transiency of this life changes its whole aspect, loses the last trace of sadness, and becomes a solemn joy. Why should we be pensive and wistful when we think how near our end is? Is the sentry sad as the hour for relieving guard comes nigh? Is the wanderer in far-off lands sad when he turns his face homewards? And why should not we rejoice at the thought that we, strangers and foreigners here, shall soon depart to the true metropolis, the mother-country of our souls? I do not know why a man should be either regretful or afraid, as he watches the hungry sea eating away this "bank and shoal of time" upon which he stands—even though the tide has all but reached his feet—if he knows that God's strong hand will be stretched forth to him at the moment when the sand dissolves from under him, and will draw him out of many waters, and place him high above the floods in that stable land where there is "no more sea."

Lives rooted in God through faith in Jesus Christ are not vanity. Let us lay hold of Him with a loving grasp —and "we shall live also" *because* He lives, *as* He lives, *so long* as He lives. The brief days of earth will be blessed while they last, and fruitful of what shall never pass. We shall have Him with us while we journey—and all our journeyings will lead to rest in Him. True, men walk in a vain shew; true, "the world passeth away and the lust thereof,"—but, blessed be God! true, also, "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

SERMON III.

THE SERVANT AND THE SON.

JOHN viii, 35.

And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

I MUST first ask your attention to a remark or two on what I conceive to be the force and connection of this passage. There is nothing in the words themselves requiring explanation or illustration. They are simple and plain enough; but their bearing on what precedes and follows, and the application which they were intended to have, present very considerable difficulty.

"The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever." This at least is clear, that our Lord is speaking of *servant* and *son* generically, or in other words, is drawing a contrast between the two relations, wherever they are found, in the matter of permanence. A son is a natural, inalienable part of the family, whatever the family may be; a slave is not. He may be acquired, he may be sold, or given away to another master, or set free. In Jewish servitude—with which Christ's hearers were chiefly familiar—there was

special provision against the slave's continuing "in the house for ever." At the Jubilee, unless he voluntarily elected to give himself up in perpetuity to his master (so passing from a state of involuntary slavery to one of willing consecration, which ceased thereby to be bondage) —in token whereof he had his ear fastened to the door-post with an awl through it—he was free to depart where he liked. But a son is bound to his father's household by a tie which no distance breaks, and no time wears away.

Then comes the question, what application does Christ mean to be made of this general truth about the characteristic difference between service and sonship? The common answer seems to me to be very unsatisfactory. It is, in brief, this—that the servants who abide not in the house for ever are the Jews who, because they regarded themselves as bound to God only by the harsh bond of constrained obedience, and were slaves, not sons at heart, would certainly forfeit their special national privileges, and be cast out of the house—the land of Israel or the old covenant. According to that interpretation, the general statement would in effect be made special by inserting "of God" in the clause, and would mean substantially this—he who is only an unwilling servant—a slave—of God's, has no permanent place in the household of God.

But you should observe that, in the previous verse, the master of the servant is distinctly specified—"he that committeth sin is the slave of *sin*." And it is a most violent and sudden twist of the connection to make it turn away all at once from speaking of slaves of sin to

speak of slaves of God. Notice, too, that both clauses of our text, the former as well as the latter, are laid as the double grounds on which the conclusion reposes—"If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Keeping these two things in view, it seems impossible to accept the ordinary explanation of the words, which wrenches them forcibly apart from the preceding verse, and disconnects them from the conclusion which our Lord founds on them in the subsequent verse, whilst it brings in a wholly irrelevant thought about the Jews being turned out of Canaan, because they were slaves and not sons of God.

Supposing, then, that whilst the words speak about servants and sons generically, laying down a general principle that applies to the whole of the two classes, the immediate application is meant to be to the slaves of *sin*, of whom He has just been speaking, would the words so referred yield an appropriate and adequate sense? What would be the force of the thought—Sin's slave does not abide for ever in Sin's house? Would it not be the declaration of the great truth that, howsoever hard and long the bondage and servitude of sin had been, yet the very relation itself is of such a character that it needs not to be perpetual, but bears upon its front the hope that one day the captive may come out of the prison-house and shake himself loose from his connection with this tyrant's household, of which he has become a part? However long and weary the years of bondage, the slave is not in his true home, nor incorporated hopelessly into his taskmaster's family. There is no natural

affinity between him and his lord; but only a bond which may be snapped at any moment, if one can be found strong enough to "enter the strong man's house, and spoil his goods." The saying, then, may be regarded as stating the possibility of emancipation as contained in the very nature of the bondage.

The next clause goes on to declare that into the midst of this tyrant's household there has come one who is a Son, and abides for ever, by natural immutable relationship, in the household of God. It is clear that the first application of the general statement, that a son is for ever part of his father's family, must be to Christ. It is therefore clear that the house in which He abides is the house of God. Sin's house, in so far as that expression denotes this fair world, belongs to God; and the tyranny which that grim despot wields is usurpation. Into the midst of human society He comes who is a Son for ever, and for ever dwells with the Father; and by reason of His everlasting Sonship and abode with God, He is able to convert the possibility of deliverance, which the very nature of the bondage proclaims, into actual fact, and to set us free. The slave need not abide for ever—*there* is hope. "The Son abides ever"—*there* is hope still brighter.

And on both facts reposes the grand certainty—"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." If He have the will, as He has the power—if it shall be that He will really use his unquestionable prerogative for the purpose for which men, with eyes dim with tears and hearts torn by desperate hopes, long through a thousand generations—then ye shall be free

indeed. Nor, in that case, will bare freedom only be ours, but, as is implied by the antithesis of our text, emancipation will be adoption, and to pass out of the state of the slave is to pass into the alternative relation—the state of a son.

I have thus put briefly, but as far as I can see fairly, the sequence of thought which our Lord would here bring before us; and I would ask you to consider whether, so understood, the words do not hold together better, and yield a more consistent and impressive meaning than in the usual interpretation of them. Let me briefly try to expand a little further the principles which are thus set forth.

I. There is first *The Possible Ending of the Tyranny of Sin.* "A slave abides not in the house for ever." Therefore the very fact that the service of sin is so hard a slavery shows it to be unnatural, abnormal, and capable of a termination. All the world has dimly hoped that it was so, if not from love of good, at all events from weariness of evil, and from pain of conscience. But no man has been sure of it, apart from the influence of revelation. It is Christ alone who makes us sure that this universal condition is yet an unnatural one, from which restoration is possible for us all. He alone shows us that the black walls of the prison-house where we toil, solid seeming though they be, high above our power to scale, and clammy with the sighs of a thousand generations, are undermined and tottering. Deliverance is possible.

For, in the light of God's revelation, we see that the slave-master is an usurper. Sin is clearly not natural to man, as God meant him to be, howsoever it may seem to

have entwined itself around his life. It is something supervening, not original; a deformity, not a part of the ideal which God made him by.

The most superficial glance at our own nature and condition, the constitution of our being, our capacities or relations, is enough to show that. The witnesses are within us. Look at these minds of ours that can originate and entertain "thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality," at those hearts with their rich treasures of transcendant affections wasted, as some drunken spendthrift throws handfuls of gold among a ragged mob; at these wills so weak and yet so strong, ever craving for some absolute authority to guide them, and yet ever impotently trying to be "a law unto themselves;" at these consciences, so sensitive and yet so dull, waking up only when the evil is done, like careless warders who lock the prison doors with all safety after the prisoner has fled, powerless to prevent but strong to avenge—voices which have no means of getting their behests obeyed, and yet are the echo of the supreme, personal Lawgiver's voice. Think of the manifest disproportion between ourselves as we are, and as we know we might be; remember that in this region *might* and *ought* are the same. And then say whether this universal condition of sinfulness is not plainly and in the deepest sense of the word—unnatural; a fungus, not a true growth; a monstrosity or abnormal development; a diseased excrescence or wen, and not sound, healthy flesh.

Then, if so, it is clear that there is no such relation between a sinful man and his sin as that deliverance from

it is impossible. It must be possible to part them, and to leave the man stronger for the loss of what made him weak, and more himself by the plucking off him of the venomous beast that has fastened upon his life. Somehow or other it must be possible to separate me from my sin, to cast that behind His back into the depths of the sea, and to set me before His face in light and love. If we are slaves of sin, then we may be transferred from that household and brought to our true home in our Father's house. Here, then, is the blessed hope for us all. Howsoever the fetters may have galled and mortified the limbs and eaten into the stiffened wrists, they may be struck off. No man is condemned to a hopeless necessary continuance in evil. We may have been living all our days in it, and, so far as in us lies, may have corrupted and perverted our whole nature. Be it so. Still the foul thing has not become so intertwined with our life that it cannot be wrenched away. No matter what we are, for all there is a possibility of deliverance. For criminals below the gallows with the rope around their necks, for those who have gone farthest into the far country of forgetfulness of God, and there have wasted themselves in riotous living—aye, and for those who are harder to touch and more hopeless than publicans and harlots—the sleek, orthodox, respectable Scribes and Pharisees, the church and chapel going people, saturated with the form of religion and uninfluenced by its power—for all, freedom is possible.

And let me remind you that men have always cherished those convictions; even when they seemed to have the least reason for them, have cherished them

obstinately in spite of history and of experience. They have tried to set themselves free, and their attempts have come to nothing; and yet, after all failures, this hope has sprung immortal in the human breast. People who have tried in vain to cure themselves of some awkward habit, some peculiarity of manner, some intonation of voice, yet believe that somehow or other there is a power fit to break from them all the chains of evil and to set them free. Strange, is it not? Pathetic, tragic, except on one hypothesis. I know few things sadder—unless we believe in Christ, the Deliverer, as I hope most of us do—than that indestructible hope with which a thousand sinful generations have lived and died without its fulfilment. What countless unfulfilled aspirations, what baffled trust, what gleams of light that faded and seemed treacherous as the morning red that dies into rainy grey before the day is old! And are the noblest visions, then, the falsest? and are we to believe the bitter creed that smiles sadly at these as airy dreams? or is it true—as the world has believed, though it knew not how its hope was to be fulfilled—that the tyranny which has ruled the earth and built high the black walls of its prison-house round all humanity is, after all, a usurpation which had a beginning later than man, and will have an end?

True, *we* cannot make the division between ourselves and our sin, nor effect the deliverance. It is like some cancer—a blood disease. We may pare and cut away the rotting flesh—the single manifestations of the evil we can do something to reduce. But the source of these is floating through the veins, and comes pulsing from the

heart. A deeper cure than our surgery is needed, a transfusion of fresh blood from an untainted source. Sin is not our personality, and so we may have it removed and live. But sin has become so entwined with ourselves that we cannot undo the tangled mass. The demoniac in the gospels—who in his confused consciousness did not know which was devil and which was man, and when the question was put, "What is thy name?" gave the awful answer, which blends so strangely the voice of both, "*My* name is legion, for *we* are many"—he could not shake off the demon that rode him. No more can we. And yet it can be dragged from its lair. Rending and tearing, convulsions and foaming, wounds and semi-death may accompany the separation. Better these than "the strong man armed, keeping his goods in peace." The voice that said, "Thou foul spirit, I charge thee come out of him," has power still.

Whence come these hopes, cherished in spite of all failures? They are like morning dreams which the proverb tells us are true. Their fulfilment is made probable by the very fact of their existence; for "God never sends mouths, but He sends meat to feed them." Their fulfilment lies in Him who fulfils the "unconscious prophecies" and the conscious cravings of heathendom and humanity—even in the Christ who is all that the world wants, and more than all that we or our brethren have dared to hope.

So much then for the first idea, contained in these words—that of the possibility, inherent in the very nature of the case, of emancipation from the burden and bondage

of sin. The next verse goes on to declare how this possibility is converted into fact. So we have—

II. *The Actual Deliverer.* The servant need not abide for ever; but is there any one who will take him out of the unnatural state of slavery? The relationship is capable of being terminated, if there is anybody who will terminate it. And the question whether there be, is answered in these words, "The Son abideth ever," which, while they are primarily a general statement, applying to all sons as such, have unquestionably a specific reference to our Lord himself. That, I presume, is clear from the fact that there is founded on them, with a "therefore," to bind it firmly to them, the grand conclusion, "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Notice, too, that if the contrasted statements of our text are to be so put together as to give ground for that joyous certainty of true freedom as the Son's gift, then somehow or other the two houses must be the same; or at least, the Son who is ever in His Father's house must yet, while thus abiding, also be in the midst of the bondsmen in the dark fortress of the tyrant. That is but a figurative way of putting the necessity which even our consciences and hearts, made wise by bitter experience of failure, can discern—that our freedom from sin must come from a power beyond the circle of humanity, and yet must be diffused from a source within the circle. Unless it come from above it will not be able to lift us out of the pit of the prison-house; but unless it be on our level we shall not be able to grasp it. The Deliverer must Himself be free; therefore He must be removed from the fatal con-

tinuity of evil, which, like a lengthened chain, shackles all the prisoners together. The Deliverer must be like those whom He would help, and be a sharer in their condition. The contradictory requirements are harmonized in One, of whom it was spoken long ago, "He hath anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives;" and who has Himself claimed to unite them both in His own person: "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." He is truly one of us, the very perfection of humanity; the whole essential characteristics of manhood are in Him. He has come down from heaven, entered the prison-house, become one of the company of slaves—and yet all the while "is in heaven," abiding in that true and unbroken fellowship with God of which He testified when He said, "The Father hath not left me alone." He is the Son of Man which came down from heaven, and He is "the only begotten Son which *is* in the bosom of the Father." Therefore is He the Deliverer of His brethren.

The conversion, then, of the mere possibility of freedom into actual fact requires two things—that the Deliverer should be the Son of God and that He should be the Son for ever. If we are ever, dear friends, to be rescued from the iron grip of this miserable bondage, it must be by one who wields and brings, and *is* the energy, and the wisdom, and the all-bestowing love of the Father. It must be by one who is a Son in that full emphatic sense of perfect kindred in, and participation of, the boundless Godhead which none other possesses. None less mighty has the power, none

less patient has the love, which such a task needs. It must be *The Son* who sets us free.

And so I come to you with that living central truth of the Gospel, and beseech you, dear brethren, to lay to heart the solemn fact of our need, and the blessed answer to it which is given to us all in Christ. "Such an high priest became us." He and his work are in accurate correspondence with our wants. There is no deliverance possible from this clinging curse of corruption unless there have come into the very midst of us bondsmen, one who shares our nature but does not share our sin, who is above us and yet beside us, who is separate from sinners and yet cleaveth closer than a brother to the most polluted, whose hands are pure and yet whose heart is so tender that He will lay His hand unshrinking on leprosy and death, who is on all points like ourselves and yet is unfettered by the chains under which we groan and die. And this impossible combination we have, blessed be God, in that dear Lord. Christ is the Son of God and the brother of every man. *There* is the life, fontal not derived, divine that it may be human; there is manhood unstained by sin, having no affinity with evil, and in its completeness a living protest against the lie that sin is an integral part of human nature, and a prophecy that we too may be like Him, set free from bondage and perfected in glory. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Yes! a Son will set free, none other will! Yes! the Son has set free. We need none other.

Further, our Lord puts emphasis here on the perpetual abiding of the Son, as a part of the basis of His fitness for the mighty work. We and all men to the end of time have to trust to a living Saviour, who is as near to the latest generations as He was to those that gathered round His cross on earth. Nay, we may even say that He is nearer to save and fuller of power to bless, not indeed in Himself, but in our apprehensions of His nearness and fulness which should be deepened by all that has passed since He ascended up on high. Have not the might of His work and the majesty of His person gained fresh illustrations from the experience of all these centuries? As distance has paled other lights, and hidden lower watch towers below the horizon, have we not learned thereby to estimate more truly the brightness of the one undying flame which burns across the waste nor knows diminution by space nor extinction by time, and to measure more accurately the height of that rallying point for the nations which towers higher and higher as we recede from it? Surely, if we will faithfully use the inspired record, the Indwelling Spirit, the voice of our own experience, and the history of God's church, we may come, by reason of the very lapse of ages, and all which they have brought of testing and of triumph, to apprehend yet more of the fulness of Christ's freedom than was possible at first. "It is expedient for you that I go away."

Nor is this all; for the Son who bids us rejoice, both for His sake and ours, that He goes to the Father, was with the Father while He walked on earth, and is with us while He is on the throne of God. He abideth ever by our

sides to bless and set free. He carries on our deliverance by the present forth-putting of His love and power, even as He effected it by his Cross. "This man, because he continueth ever, is able to save unto the uttermost." We have an ever-living Saviour to trust to. "The Son abideth for ever." "If he therefore make us free, we shall be free indeed."

III. Then, finally, we may very briefly touch upon the thought that is implied here and in the whole context—namely, *The Abiding Sonship which constitutes the Slave's Emancipation.*

The process of deliverance is the transfer from the one household to the other. We are set free from our bondage when, through Christ, we receive the adoption, and "cry, Abba, Father!" This filial spirit, the spirit of life which was in Christ, and this alone, "makes us free from the law of sin and death." The only way by which a man is reclaimed from obedience to sin is by his learning to call God Father, and by receiving into his evil nature the life, kindred with the paternal source, which owns no allegiance to his former taskmaster. The only way by which a man receives that new life from God that has nothing to do with sin, and that consciousness of kindred with God which makes the name "Father" natural to his heart, is by simple faith in Christ, who gives power to become sons of God to as many as receive Him.

There are but two conditions in which we can stand. One or other of them must be ours. The alternatives are—Slaves of Sin, or Sons of God. What a contrast

both in the relation and in that to which it is sustained? Slaves or Sons! God or Sin! On the one side tyrannous bondage, on the other gentle swaying love. On the one side the whip and the lash, on the other, "My son, hear the instruction of thy Father." On the one side is *such* a Master, to obey whom is degradation, and like all base-born usurpers, cruel as lawless. What a wretched humiliation for a man with such a nature to be the serf of such a Lord—to be, as Milton says, "the dejected and down-trodden vassal of Perdition!" On the other side is the source of all love, the fruition of all desires, the fountain of all purity and all peace. And we, dear brethren, may, through Christ, draw near to Him as sons and "cry, Abba, Father!" Then we shall abide in His house for ever, in the happy consciousness of His Fatherhood and love, compassed by His care, and enriched by His gifts, and glad to serve, and blessed in obedience. Earth's changes will not take us away from our rest in God, nor its distractions rob us of the sweetness of kindred with Him. Whithersoever we go we may still be at home with God; whatsoever we do we may still be about our Father's business. Death itself shall not break the sonship, nor our consciousness of it. We shall but pass from the outer to the inner abiding place in our Father's house, the place prepared for us by The Son, who set us free. "Thou art no more a servant, but a son." And if sons, then "heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

SERMON IV.

THE CITY AND RIVER OF GOD.

PSALM xlvi, 4—7.

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

THERE are two remarkable events in the history of Israel, one or the other of which most probably supplied the historical basis upon which this psalm rests. One is that singular deliverance of the armies of Jehoshaphat from the attacking forces of the bordering nations, which is recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Chronicles. There you will find that, by a singular arrangement, the *sons of Korah*, members of the priestly order, were not only in the van of the battle, but celebrated the victory by hymns of gladness. It is possible that this may be one of those hymns; but I think rather that the more ordinary reference is the correct one, which sees in this psalm and in the two succeeding, the echoes

of that supernatural deliverance of Israel in the time of Hezekiah, when

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,"

and Sennacherib and all his army were, by the blast from the breath of His nostrils, swept into swift destruction.

The reasons of that historical application may be briefly stated. We find, for instance, a number of remarkable correspondences between each psalm and portions of the Book of the prophet Isaiah, who, as we know, lived in the period of that deliverance. The comparison, for example, which is here drawn with such lofty, poetic force between the quiet river which makes glad the city of God, and the tumultuous billows of the troubled sea, which shakes the mountain and moves the earth, is drawn by Isaiah in regard to the Assyrian invasion, when he speaks of "Israel refusing the waters of Shiloah," which go softly, and, therefore, having brought upon them the waters of the river—the power of Assyria—"which shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel."

Notice, too, that the very same consolation which was given to Isaiah, by the revelation of that significant appellation, "Immanuel, God with us," appears in this psalm as a kind of refrain, and is the foundation of all its confident gladness, "The Lord of Hosts is with us."

Besides these obvious parallelisms, there are others to which I need not refer, which, taken altogether, seem to render it at least probable that we have in this psalm the devotional echo of the great deliverance of Israel from Assyria in the time of Hezekiah.

Now, these verses are the cardinal central portion of the

song. We may call them The Hymn of the Defence and Deliverance of the City of God. We cannot expect to find in poetry the same kind of logical accuracy in the process of thought which we require in treatises; but the lofty emotion of devout song obeys laws of its own: and it is well to surrender ourselves to the flow, and to try to see with the psalmist's eyes for a moment his sources of consolation and strength.

I take the four points which seem to be the main turning points of these verses—first, the gladdening river; second, the indwelling helper; third, the conquering voice; and fourth, the alliance of ourselves by faith with the safe dwellers in the city of God.

I. First, we have *the gladdening River*—an emblem of many great and joyous truths.

The figure is occasioned by, or at all events derives much of its significance from a geographical peculiarity of Jerusalem. Alone among the great cities and historical centres of the world, it stood upon no broad river. One little perennial stream, or rather rill of living water, was all which it had; but Siloam was mightier and more blessed for the dwellers in the rocky fortress of the Jebusites than the Euphrates, Nile, or Tiber for the historical cities which stood upon their banks. One can see the psalmist looking over the plain eastward, and beholding in vision the mighty forces which came against them, symbolized and expressed by the breadth and depth and swiftness of the great river upon which Nineveh sat as a queen, and then thinking upon the little tiny thread of living water that flowed past the base of the rock upon

which the temple was perched. It seems small and unconspicuous—nothing compared to the dash of the waves and the rise of the floods of those mighty secular empires, still, "There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." Its waters shall never fail, and thirst shall flee whithersoever this river comes.

It is also to be remembered that the psalm is running in the track of a certain constant symbolism that pervades all Scripture. From the first book of Genesis down to the last chapter of Revelation, you can hear the dashing of the waters of the river. "It went out from the garden and parted into four heads." "Thou makest them drink of the river of thy pleasures." "Behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward," and everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh. "He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Isaiah, who has already afforded some remarkable parallels to the words of our psalm, gives another very striking one to the image now under consideration, when he says, "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars." The picture in that metaphor is of a stream lying round Jerusalem, like the moated rivers which girdle some of the cities in the plains of Italy, and are the defence of those who dwell enclosed in their flashing links.

Guided, then, by the physical peculiarity of situation

which I have referred to, and by the constant meaning of scriptural symbolism, I think we must conclude that this river, "the streams whereof make glad the city of God," is God himself in the outflow and self-communication of His own grace to the soul. The stream is the fountain in flow. The gift of God, which is living water, is God himself, considered as the ever-imparting source of all refreshment, of all strength, of all blessedness. "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe should receive."

We must dwell for a moment or two still further upon these words, and mark how this metaphor, in a most simple and natural way, sets forth very grand and blessed spiritual truths with regard to this communication of God's grace to them that love Him and trust Him. First, I think we may see here a very beautiful suggestion of the *manner*, and then of the *variety*, and then of the *effects* of that communication of the Divine love and grace.

The *manner*. We have only to read the previous verses to see what I mean. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." There you can hear the wild waves dashing round the base of the firm hills, sapping their strength, and toppling their crests down in the bubbling, yeasty foam. Remember how, not only in Scripture but in all poetry, the sea has been

the emblem of endless unrest. Its waters, those barren, wandering fields of foam, going moaning round the world with unprofitable labour, how they have been the emblem of unbridled power; of tumult and strife, and anarchy and rebellion! Then mark how our text brings into sharpest contrast with all that hurly-burly of the tempest, and the dash and roar of the troubled waters, the gentle, quiet flow of the river, "the streams whereof make glad the city of God;" the translucent little ripples purling along beds of golden pebbles, and the enamelled meadows drinking the pure stream as it steals by them. Thus, says our psalm, not with noise, not with tumult, not with conspicuous and destructive energy, but in silent, secret underground communication, God's grace, God's love, His peace, His power, His Almighty and gentle Self flow into men's souls. Quietness and confidence on our sides correspond to the quietness and serenity with which He glides into the heart. Instead of all the noise of the sea you have within the quiet impartations of the voice that is still and small, wherein God dwells. The extremest power is silent. The mightiest force in all the universe is the force which has neither speech nor language. The parent of all physical force, as astronomists seem to be more and more teaching us, is the great central Sun which moveth all things, which operates all physical changes, whose beams are all but omnipotent, and yet fall so quietly that they do not disturb the motes that dance in the rays. Thunder and lightning are child's play compared with the energy that goes to make the falling dews and quiet rains. The power of the sunshine

is the root power of all force which works in material things. And so we turn, with the symbol in our hands, to the throne of God, and when He says, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," we are aware of an energy, the signature of whose might is its quietness, which is omnipotent because it is gentle and silent. The seas may roar and be troubled, the tiny thread of the river is mightier than they all.

And then, still further, in this first part of our text there is also set forth very distinctly the number and the *variety* of the gifts of God. "The streams whereof," literally, "the *divisions* whereof." That is to say, going back to Eastern manners, the broad river is broken up into canals that are led off into every man's little bit of garden ground; coming down to modern manners, the great reservoir goes by pipes into every man's household and chamber. The stream has its divisions; listen to words that are a commentary upon the meaning of this verse, "All these worketh that one and the self-same spirit, dividing unto every man severally as he will"—an infinite variety, an endless diversity, according to all the petty wants of each that is supplied thereby. As you can take and divide the water all but infinitely, and it will take the shape of every containing vessel, so into every soul according to its capacities, according to its shape, according to its needs, this great gift, this blessed presence of the God of our strength shall come. The varieties of His gifts are as much the mark of His omnipotence as the gentleness and stillness of them.

And then I need only touch upon the last thought, the

effects of this communicated God. "The streams make glad"—with the gladness which comes from refreshment, with the gladness that comes from the satisfying of all thirsty desires, with the gladness which comes from the contact of the spirit with absolute completeness; of the will, with perfect authority; of the heart, with changeless love; of the understanding, with pure incarnate truth; of the conscience, with infinite peace; of the child, with the father; of my emptiness, with His fulness; of my changeableness, with His immutability; of my incompleteness, with His perfectness. They to whom this stream passes shall know no thirst; they who possess it from them it shall come. Out of him "shall flow rivers of living waters." That all-sufficient spirit not only becomes to its possessor the source of individual refreshment, and slakes his own thirst, but flows out from him for the gladdening of others.

> "The least flower, with a brimming cup may stand,
> And share its dew-drop with another near."

The city thus supplied may laugh at besieging hosts. With the deep reservoir in its central fortress, the foe may do as they list to all surface streams; its water shall be sure, and no raging thirst shall ever drive it to surrender. The river breaks from the threshold of the temple within its walls, and when all beyond that safe enclosure is cracked and parched in the fierce heat, and no green thing can be seen in the dry and thirsty land, that stream shall make glad the city of our God, and everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh. "Thou shalt be as a well-watered garden, and as a river whose streams fail not."

II. Then notice, secondly, substantially the same general thought, but modified and put in plain words—*the indwelling Helper.*

"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, *and that* right early." Or, as the latter clause had better be translated, as it is given in the margin of some of our Bibles, "God shall help her at the appearance of the morning." There are two things there. First of all, the *constant presence;* and second, *help at the right time.* Whether there be actual help or no, there is always with us the potential help of God, and it flashes into energy at the moment that He knows to be the right one. The appearing of the morning He determines; not you or I. Therefore, we may be confident that ever we have God by our sides. Not that that presence is meant to avert outward or inward trouble and trial, and painfulness and weariness; but in the midst of these, and while they last, here is the assurance, "She shall not be moved;" and that it will not always last, here is the ground of the confidence, "God shall help her when the morning dawns."

I need not point out to you the contrast here between the tranquillity of the city which has for its central inhabitant and Governor the omnipotent God, and the tumult of all that turbulent earth. The waves of the troubled waters break everywhere,—they run over the flat plains and sweep over the mountains of secular strength and outward might, and worldly kingdoms, and human polities and earthly institutions, acting on them all either by slow corrosive action at the base, or by the tossing floods

swirling against them, until they shall be lost in the ocean of time. For "the history of the world is the judgment of the world." When He wills the plains are covered and mountains disappear, but one rock stands fast—"The mountain of the Lord's house is exalted above the top of the mountains;" and when everything is rocking and swaying in the tempests, here is fixity and tranquillity. She shall not be moved. Why? Because of her citizens? No! Because of her guards and gates? No! Because of her polity? No! Because of her orthodoxy? No! But because God is in her, and she is safe, and where He dwells no evil can come. "Thou carriest Cæsar and his fortunes." The ship of Christ carries the Lord and His fortune; and, therefore, whatsoever becomes of the other little ships in the wild dash of the tempest, this with the Lord on board arrives at its desired haven—"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

Then, still further, that presence which is always the pledge of stability, and unmoved calm, even while causes of agitation are storming around, will, as I said, flash into energy, and be a helper and a deliverer at the right moment. And when will that right moment be? At the appearing of the morning. "And when they arose early in the morning, they were all dead corpses;" in the hour of greatest extremity, but ere the foe has executed his purposes; not too soon for fear and faith, not too late for hope and help; when the morning dawns, when the appointed hour of deliverance, which He alone determines, has struck. "It is not for you to know the

times and seasons;" but this we may know, that He who is the Lord of time will ever save at the best possible moment. He will not come so quickly as to prevent us from feeling our need; He will not tarry so long as to make us sick with hope deferred, or so long as to let the enemy fulfil his purposes of destruction.

"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was . . . Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. . . . And he that was dead came forth."

The Lord may seem to sleep on his hard wooden pillow in the stern of the little fishing boat, and even while the frail craft begins to fill may show no sign of help. But ere the waves have rolled over her, the cry of fear that yet trusts, and of trust that yet fears, wakes Him who knew the need, even while He seemed to slumber, and one mighty word, as of a master to some petulant slave, "Peace! be still," hushes the confusion, and rebukes the fear, and rewards the faith.

"The Lord is in the midst of her"—that is the perennial fact. "The Lord shall help her, and that right early"—that is the "grace for seasonable help."

III. The psalm having set forth these broad grounds of confidence, goes on to tell the story of actual deliverance which confirms them, and of which they are indeed but the generalized expression. The condensed narrative

moves to its end by a series of short crashing sentences like the ring of the destructive axe at the roots of trees. We see the whole sequence of events as by lightning flashes, which give brief glimpses and are quenched. The grand graphic words seem to pant with haste, as they record Israel's deliverance. That deliverance comes from *the Conquering Voice.*

"The heathen raged" (the same word, we may note, as is found a verse or two back, "Though the waters thereof *roar*"), "the kingdoms were moved; he uttered his voice, the earth melted."

With what vigour these hurried sentences describe, first, the wild wrath and formidable movements of the foe, and then the One Sovereign Word which quells them all, as well as the instantaneous weakness that dissolves the seeming solid substance when the breath of His lips smites it!

And where will you find a grander or loftier thought than this, that the simple word—the utterance of the pure will of God conquers all opposition, and tells at once in the sphere of material things? He speaks, and it is done. At the sound of that thunder-voice, hushed stillness and a pause of dread falls upon all the wide earth, deeper and more awe-struck than the silence of the woods with their huddling leaves, when the feebler peals roll through the sky. "The depths are congealed in the heart of the sea"—as if you were to lay hold of Niagara in its wildest plunge, and were with a word to freeze all its descending waters and stiffen them into immovableness in fetters of eternal ice. So He utters His voice, and all

meaner noises are hushed. "The lion hath roared, who shall not fear?"

He speaks—no weapon, no material vehicle is needed. The point of contact between the pure Divine will and the material creatures which obey its behests is ever wrapped in darkness, whether these be the settled ordinances which men call nature, or the less common which the Bible calls miracle. In all alike there is, to every believer in a God at all, an incomprehensible action of the spiritual upon the material, which allows of no explanations to bridge over the gulf recognized in the broken utterances of our psalm, "He uttered his voice: the earth melted."

How grandly, too, these last words give the impression of immediate and utter dissolution of all opposition! All the Titanic brute forces are, at His voice, disintegrated, and lose their organization and solidity. "The hills melted like wax;" "The mountains flowed down at thy presence." The hardness and obstinacy is all liquefied and enfeebled, and parts with its consistency and is lost in a fluid mass. As two carbon points when the electric stream is poured upon them are gnawed to nothingness by the fierce heat, and you can see them wasting before your eyes, so the concentrated ardour of His breath falls upon the hostile evil, and lo! it is not.

The psalmist is generalizing the historical fact of the sudden and utter destruction of Sennacherib's host into a universal law. And it *is* a universal law—true for us as for Hezekiah and the sons of Korah, true for all generations. Martin Luther might well make this psalm

the battle cry of the Reformation, and we may well make our own the rugged music and dauntless hope of his rendering of these words :—

> "And let the Prince of Ill
> Look grim as e'er he will,
> He harms us not a whit.
> For why? His doom is writ.
> A word shall quickly slay him."

IV. Then note, finally, how the psalm shows us *The act by which we enter the City of God.*

"The Lord of Hosts is with *us;* the God of Jacob is *our* refuge."

It is not enough to lay down general truths, however true and however blessed, about the safe and sacred city of God—not enough to be theoretically convinced of the truth of the supreme governance and ever-present aid of God. We must take a further step that will lead us far beyond the regions of barren intellectual apprehension of the great truths of God's love and care. These truths are nothing to us, brethren, unless, like the psalmist here, we make them our own, and, losing the burden of self in the very act of grasping them by faith, unite ourselves with the great multitude who are joined together in Him, and say, "He is *my* God: He is *our* refuge." That living act of "appropriating faith" pre-supposes, indeed, the presence of these truths in our understandings, but in the very act they are changed into powers in our lives. They pass into the affections and the will. They are no more empty generalities. Bread nourishes, not when it is looked at, but when it is eaten. "He that eateth me,

even he shall live by me." We feed on Christ when we make Him ours by faith, and each of us is sustained and blessed by Him when we can say, "My Lord and my God."

Mark, too, how there is here set forth the twofold ground for our calmest confidence in these two mighty names of God.

"The Lord of Hosts is with us." That majestic name includes all the deepest and most blessed thoughts of God which the earlier revelation imparted. That name of "Jehovah" proclaims at once His Eternal Being and His covenant relation—manifesting Him by its mysterious meaning as He who dwells above time; the tideless sea of absolute unchanging existence, from whom all the stream of creatural life flows forth many coloured and transient, to whom it all returns; who, Himself unchanging, changeth all things; and declaring Him, by the historical associations connected with it, as having unveiled His purposes in firm words, to which men may trust, and as having entered into that solemn league with Israel which underlay their whole national life. He is *the Lord* the Eternal,—the covenant name.

He is the Lord of Hosts, the "imperator," absolute master and commander, captain and king of all the combined forces of the universe, whether they be personal or impersonal, spiritual or material, who, in serried ranks, wait on Him, and move harmonious, obedient to His will.

And this Eternal Master of the legions of the universe is with us, weak and poor, and troubled and sinful as we

are. Therefore, we will not fear: what can man do unto us?

Again, when we say, "The God of Jacob is our refuge," we reach back into the past, and lay hold of the mercies promised to, and received by, the long vanished generations who trusted in Him and were lightened. As, by the one name, we appeal to His own Being and uttered pledge, so, by the other, we appeal to His ancient deeds—past as we call them, but present with Him, who lives and loves above the low fences of time in the undivided eternity. All that He has been, He is; all that He has done, He is doing. We on whom the ends of the earth are come have the same helper, the same friend that "the world's grey patriarchs" had. They that go before do not prevent them that come after. The river is full still. The van of the pilgrim host did, indeed, long, long ago drink and were satisfied, but the bright waters are still as pellucid, still as near, still as refreshing, still as abundant as they ever were. Nay, rather, they are fuller and more accessible to us than to patriarch and psalmist, "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

For we, brethren, have a fuller revelation of that mighty name, and a more wondrous and closer divine presence by our sides. The psalm rejoices in that "The Lord of Hosts is with us;" and the choral answer of the Gospel swells into loftier music, as it tells of the fulfilment of psalmists' hopes and prophets' visions in Him who is called "Immanuel," which is, being interpreted,

"God with us." The psalm is confident in that God dwelt in Zion. And our confidence has the more wondrous fact to lay hold of, that even now the Word who dwelt among us makes His abode in every believing heart, and gathers them all together at last in that great city, round whose flashing foundations no tumult of ocean beats, whose gates of pearl need not be closed against any foes, with whose happy citizens "God will dwell, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

SERMON V.

THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST.

EPHES. iv, 20, 21.

But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him.

THE direct and immediate purpose of these words is to show the irreconcilable contradiction between a course of life such as that of other Gentiles, and the Christian discipline and instruction which these Ephesian believers had received. The Apostle draws a dreadful picture of heathenism, which we might profitably hang up by the side of the flattering portraits of "elegant mythologies" which we meet with in these days, when there is some danger that the study of the philosophy of mythology may blind us to the moral and spiritual effects of idolatry. Here is the estimate formed by a man who had looked at the thing with his own eyes, sharpened and cleared by fellowship with God—"In the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them—past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

1

He starts back, as it were, with quick recoil of abhorrence from such a hideous picture as that—"But ye have not *so* learned Christ." The diametrical opposition between so foul a life, and the principles in which you have been trained, needs no more words. And then, as is natural to so fervid a disposition, in which logic is blended with emotion, he seems for a moment to forget his more immediate purpose, and to branch off into what, brief as it is, is yet almost a complete view of the school of Christ—the scholars, the teacher, the theme, the process of education, and the purpose for which it is all given.

The words are very remarkable; carrying, as I think, some very precious lessons, and opening up regions of truth not so familiar as they should be to much of our popular religious thought. With this general idea, that the words of my text are a description of the School of Christ, I wish to consider them a little more particularly now. If we look at them and those which immediately follow, we shall see that they present Christ Himself as the great lesson learned in His school—"Ye have not so learned Christ;" that they regard Christ himself as being the teacher as well as the lesson—"Ye have heard him;" that they contemplate the learning as a gradual process of tuition, which takes effect on condition of union with Christ—"Ye have been taught in him," not "by him," as our translation inaccurately has it; that they further define the form and manner of the teaching as being in accordance with truth in Jesus—embodied as it were in Him, and that they put the whole purpose, or possibly in

another aspect the whole substance, of all this educational process as being the investiture of the scholars with a new nature made like God, and the divesting them of their ancient evil—"That ye put off the old man, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

It would lead us too far to attempt to cover all this ground to-day. But we may consider together these three points contained in our text in a somewhat different order, and deal briefly with The Teacher; The Process of Instruction; and The Theme.

I. Notice that we have here distinctly affirmed that *The living voice of Christ himself is our teacher.*

"Ye have heard *Him*," says Paul. Do not water down these plain and strong words as if they meant only "Ye have heard about him," and were nothing more than a strongly figurative way of speaking. We do, indeed, say of men long gone, the mighty dead who "rule our spirits from their urns," that "being dead they yet speak." In their books, in the records of their lives, in the influence which still vibrates from their deeds, we may be regarded as hearing them still. But it is no vague prolongation of influence from the shadowy past that Paul is thinking of, when he says that these Ephesians had heard Christ. Neither is it any literal listening to His words when He spake on earth that could have place in the experience of these men, who were "worshippers of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter," when he lifted up the gentle voice that was not heard in the streets. Remember that the New Testament

everywhere represents Christ as still working and teaching in the world; remember that He himself promised the prolongation of His great work of declaring the Father beyond the limits of His earthly life, and that no more in proverbs, but plainly. Remember that He has pledged Himself to send that teaching Spirit of truth, in whose coming Christ Himself comes, and all whose illuminations and communications are showing and imparting to us the things of Christ. The ever-living Saviour, in His continuous energy and real presence in the midst of the Church, which is His school, teaches us, not as men who are gone do; not merely in that He is the theme, but also in that He is the living breath and inspiring power of all the means by which we learn of Him. Every living soul may have, and every Christian soul does have, direct access for himself to the living Lord, the Eternal Word. Christ is the Teacher, the only Teacher, the Teacher for all men, the Teacher of all truth. He only is our Master, and gathered at His feet all we are brethren. It is His living influence that flows to us through the channel of His word. It is His voice that speaks to us in all providences. It is He who makes the syllables that come from human lips eloquent to reach our understanding, and to calm and gladden our hearts. In every region of Christian culture and tuition, the real source of all the blessing is Christ Himself, and the real Master, Example, and Authority, Instructor and Trainer is that ever-living Lord, who speaketh from heaven, who speaketh in his servants' hearts, who uses as His medium the Book which records His life and death, and subordinately the events of life

and the tongues of men—but is Himself the breath which breathes through these all.

Dear friends, is not this great and yet simple principle one that we sorely need to be reminded of, and to grasp more firmly? We think far too much of that Lord as a Lord gone from us, whose influence consists only in what He was and did. Blessed be His name! His influence *is* all built upon what He did once which lives for ever, and the record of that is the great means which He uses for our instruction in righteousness. But it is no merely past Saviour that we have to look to for teaching, but the presence of an ever-living Lord—that active presence in the souls of all believers, that pleading approach to the souls of all who hear of His love—who hour by hour is seeking to bring us all closer to Himself. We have heard Him—whether we know it or not. Let not the loud noises of earth, the strife of tongues, the hubbub without and the discords within our spirits, deaden our ears to His loving low tones. We have heard Him—whether we have listened and obeyed, or have turned away. Let us answer when He calls, with all our yielding spirits bending to His will, and our hearts opening to His voice—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

II. Then notice, secondly, that *Those who are in Christ receive continuous instruction from Him.* "And have been taught in Him." These words, which next follow in our text, seem to imply the conditions and the gradual process of Christ's schooling. "Hearing Him" may refer rather to the initial act by which we come under His instruction, and then this clause will apply to the whole subsequent

process. His teaching is not one act, but a long, loving patient discipline. The first feeble motion of faith enrolls us as disciples, and then there follows through all the years the "teaching to observe all things, whatsoever He has commanded." It is to be further observed that the Apostle does not say, as our translation makes him say, "Ye have been taught *by* Him," but "Ye have been taught *in* Him." There are, then, these two considerations to be touched upon here—that the condition of receiving His schooling is to be in Christ, and that that schooling is imparted by a gradual process.

I suppose I need not occupy much of your time in dilating upon that first thought. It is, I may say, the very key-note of this Epistle to the Ephesians, which is penetrated throughout by that idea of our living union with Christ, and indwelling in Him. It is expressed in many metaphors. We are rooted in Him as the tree in the soil, which makes it firm and fruitful. We are built into Him as the strong foundations of the temple are bedded in the living rock. We live in Him as the limbs in the body. The union of wedded love is but a feeble type of that "great mystery concerning Christ and His Church." That thought underlies every exhortation, is alleged as the basis of every duty, crowns the summit of every hope. For illustration turn for a moment to the first chapter of the Epistle, and mark the reiteration with which the words "in Christ" are used, and indwelling in Him regarded as the condition of everything that a Christian possesses, of everything that he can expect. He writes to "the faithful *in Christ Jesus*." He blesses

God who "has blessed with all spiritual blessings . . . *in Christ:*" we have been chosen *in Him.* "*In the beloved* God has bestowed his grace upon us." And, more remarkable still, "*In Him* we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"—words which in their fulness complete the doctrine of redemption with a very needful element, often overlooked and neglected. We have not said the whole truth about pardon when we have said, "We have forgiveness through his blood." Neither have we said the whole when we say, "In whom we have redemption." Both clauses are wanted. "In him" is the personal source and fountain. "Through his blood" is the channel or means. We have not redemption in His work without His person, nor in His person without His work. We have not redemption through His blood unless we are in Him, joined to Him by that deep and true union effected by faith, which is the condition of that mighty work done for us, being applied to us. Still further, aspects of the same profound thought occur in that first chapter—*in Christ* all things in heaven and earth are to be gathered together; *in Him* we have obtained an inheritance; and so we might travel through the whole letter, and be met everywhere by the same representation of the whole Christian life being Life in Christ.

We surely do not reach the whole depth of such words when we regard them as a mere metaphor, or take them to imply nothing more than yielding our will and understanding to our Teacher. It is something much deeper than that. The indwelling is reciprocal, and its very

nature, as well as its blessed results, implies the true divinity of that Lord who can enter human souls in all ages by a path that no finite creature can traverse, and who can gather the homeless hearts of all the race beneath the shadow of His wings, and hide them in the depths of His own heart in an intimacy of which our closest friendships here are but pale shadows. They tell us that no two atoms ever really touch; some film of air is ever between them. And after all sweetness of closest society there is a gap between the most loving souls. But we can be joined to Christ in real perfect union.

The indwelling, we say, is reciprocal. He is in us, and we are in Him. He is in us as the source of our Being; we are in Him as filled with His fulness. He is in us all-communicative; we are in Him all-receptive. He is in us as the sunlight in the else darkened chamber; we are in Him as the cold green log cast into the flaming furnace, glows through and through with ruddy and transforming heat. He is in us as the sap in the veins of the tree; we are in Him as the branches. "As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me."

And how is this interpenetration which people call mystical, as if that meant fanatical and unreal, forgetting that there is a true "mysticism"—how is this interpenetration of my spirit and the Spirit of Life in my Lord brought about, so as that all through my darkness there shall be shot rays of His brightness, and all through my stained evil there shall glow the lustre of His light, the brightness of His righteousness? The analogies of our

closest earthly unions, though they reach not to the depth of this wonderful indwelling, may help us to some part of the answer. What is the solvent that makes human spirits flow together? Is there not one force which goes far to throw down the dark barriers that separate man from man, and man from woman—one mighty emotion whose breath makes them melt like wax, and souls blend together, and be one in thought and will, in purpose and hope? And when that one uniting force in human society—Love built upon Confidence—is diverted from the poor finite creatures, and transferred from one another to Him, then His Infinite Energy, which is ever around us whether we know it and open our hearts to it or no, flows into our being, and becomes an indwelling guest which fills our souls. They that love are one. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." And as the prophet in the wonderful old story laid himself down on the dead child, hand to hand, mouth to mouth, lip to lip, and heart to heart, that the throbbing heart might move the pulses, and the warmth might steal into the dull cold frame, so, but with a contact closer, more real, more all-embracing as is the difference between man and God, between spirit and flesh, Christ lays His life to our death, and in Him we too live and move. In Him we are quickened together and raised up together. Christ's dwelling in us, and we in Him, is the secret and the condition of all our spiritual life. Christian men and women! beware that nothing weaken or break that Divine union. He is in us, except we be reprobate. We are in Him, except we be dead. "Ye have been taught *in* Him."

And this closeness of real union, made possible by faith and love, and in its nature miraculous, supernatural, involving a new energy of the divine will within the iron limits of the natural order,—this union is the *condition* of all learning in His school. Of course; for Christ's teaching is no outward communication of cut-and-dried notions which may be given, if only the scholar's understanding comes in contact with the teacher's; it is no impartation of outward commands which may be given if only the disciples' will yield to the master's; but His teaching is essentially the communication of Himself, and that is only possible where, by reason of trustful dependence and the attachment of the whole throbbing being to Him, the barriers between us and the influx of that divine river of light and wisdom have been all swept away.

And then there is another idea on which I may touch for a moment, and that is the *gradual process* by which this education in union with Him is effected. "Ye *have been taught* in Him." Step by step, by the slow unveiling of that which we received, thank God! when, howsoever dimly, we apprehended His perfect beauty, and all commanding authority over us; step by step these are unfolded to our consciences, to our hearts, to our whole being. And so, dear brethren, do not you fancy that it is enough, when you have been entered in Christ's school. Do not you fancy that you have said enough when you have said, as a great many people do say, "I am a Christian; I was converted ten, twenty, thirty years ago; I heard Christ speak." Very likely. But has the point

been drawn out into a line? Have you gone on as you began? Has the gradual tuition followed upon the initial submission? Have you been learning of Him, as well as listening to Him once, a long, long while ago? Why, how many amongst us are there—I speak now to the more matured in years of my congregation, and the older in Christian character—how many of us that have got any new gleams either of theological or practical wisdom from Christ for years past? How many of us that have got deeper constructions of our duties than we used to have? How many of us that keep open heart for all new thoughts that shall shine upon us from Christ's truth and Christ's teaching? And how many of us are like great overgrown boys, whose education has been neglected, sitting upon the lowest form with their spelling books in their hands when they are men, and having learnt next door to nothing, in all the years we have called ourselves Christians? Paul felt it to be a gradual process. Has it been a gradual process with you and me, dear brethren? Is it not true that we are angry rather than thankful when some new thought comes to us out of His word, disturbing all the rest, just as when you get a new piece of furniture into your house, you have to arrange and re-arrange all the other pieces in order to get it straight? How many of us have formularized our imperfect knowledge of Christ into an absolute creed that we brandish in everybody's face, and declare there is nothing beyond but cloudland, and no verities for thought nor maxims for practice that we have not made clear to ourselves already? We talk about progressive instruction,

going on to the end of our lives. Ninety-nine hundredths of us believe not only (what is true) that we have got all when we have once grasped Christ, but that all which we have got when we have once grasped Him is open to our consciousness in the very beginning of our Christian course. It is not so. He puts not bread into our hands but seed corn; and although we carry away the full sack whenever we go to our Brother and ask Him to feed our hungriness, it is germinal principles that He gives us rather than loaves, and we have got to cultivate them and watch them, and patiently too, in the belief that He will bless the springing thereof, and after many days we shall find seed for new sowing, as well as bread for the eater!

III. This gradualness and slowness of instruction is brought out still more distinctly if we look at the third idea which is contained in these words, as to the substance of the instruction—*The theme of the Teaching is the Teacher.* "Ye have not so learned *Christ*." Then our lesson is—not thoughts about the Lord, but the living Lord Himself, not the doctrine of Christianity only, but Christ the theme as well as the teacher. Not that I mean to say that doctrines—dogmas if you like—which are nothing more than the principles of God's revelation put into as good logical shape and form as man's poor understanding can put them—not that they are to be disposed of in the fashion that too many people do dispose of them nowadays. I do not know any way by which we can attain to the knowledge of the living person but by the truths about Him, which some people despise as being "dogmatic theology."

But putting that on one side, what I wish to insist upon is this, that in that Christ, the man Christ Jesus, the Son of God, there lie the thoughts for all our knowledge, the master principles of all our conceptions, the light of all our seeing; that in Him, His person, His deeds, His utterances, His relations to men, His relation to God, there is the formative basis of everything that is worth thinking about and knowing in regard to every subject which does not belong to the mere material life of man. All philosophy, all ethics, all reasonable history of humanity, the principles of all the communities into which men shall aggregate themselves, light upon the nature of man's spirit, light upon the relations of man to God, the hopes that burn bright with immortality in the midst of the darkness of the grave, and if there be any other theme above the level of the beasts that perish and the wants that are like theirs, they are all to be found in Him—in whom, by no hyperbole, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Gather off your beech trees in the budding spring days a little brown shell, in which lies tender green leafage, and if you will carefully strip it you will find packed in a compass that might almost go through the eye of a needle, the whole of that which afterwards in the sunshine is to spread and grow to the yellow-green foliage which delights and freshens the eye. So in Christ—to be unfolded through slow generations, in accordance with human experience and wants, is all that men can know or need to know concerning God and themselves, and the relations of both—their duties, their hopes, their fears, and their love.

If that be true, and if in Him, and in living contact with Him, there be light for the understanding and absolute commandment for the will, which really desires to be commanded and not to have its own way; changeless and perfect love for the heart, which really longs to twine round that stay which is never to be taken up nor cut down, the fruition of all the sensitive desires, and the adequate and sufficient refuge in every changing circumstance,—if that be so, then, as a matter of course, an *endless* process of tuition must needs go on in order that even partially and inadequately, and yet in such degree as the finite is capable of the infinite, we may possess Christ and be finished scholars in His school. Because, then, He is our theme, we cannot die nor pass away till we have learned Him all, and therefore they that love Him and trust Him must live for ever and ever, growing in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The same idea might substantially be suggested by that somewhat enigmatical and difficult phrase which closes the words of our text—"If we have learned, and been taught, as the truth is in Jesus;" our knowledge should, and sometime will, correspond to the absolute truth that resides in Him, and not until between our perceptions of Him and the reality of what He is there is an equilibrium, not until then has that tuition come to its close.

Finally, our text has one distinct purpose in all the depth and grandeur of its scope, and that is to set forth the practical issue of all those lessons that are taught in the school of Christ. He speaks, and we hear Him.

Patiently and day by day He teaches us. Joined to Him we are recipients of His tuition and His discipline. We advance in His knowledge, appropriating ever more and more of Himself, and becoming more and more conscious that He is the basis of our action, and the ground of our hope. And it is all for what? That we may be happy? Yes. That we may be wise? Yes. That we may escape hell? Yes; if we know what hell means. That we may go to heaven? Yes; if we understand what heaven is. And perhaps you will find the definition of both best if you read on in the text, and learn that all this sedulous training and blessed growth is for this purpose—that we may "put off the old man," wherein is damnation, and that we may "put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

And so, then, dear brethren, what we have to do is simply to yield up our understandings, our wills, our hearts, our consciences, and all the activities of our lives to Him; to be commanded, to be cleansed, to be enlightened, to be filled with His love, to be conformed to His likeness, for the voice that spoke from the heavens speaks to us yet—"This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him!"

SERMON VI.

THE NEW NAME.

REV. ii, 17.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

THERE may be discerned in the various promises to the victors in these seven epistles a general correspondence between the form of their trials and the form of their reward. In the present case the words of my text are addressed to a church, of which it is said that in the midst of much temptation and many false teachers they held fast "*my* name." They were true to that name, the revealed character of their Lord and Master; and, being faithful to that, nor suffering themselves to be either flattered, or sneered, or persuaded, or argued out of it, there comes as a consequence that having overcome they shall receive the new name—which, as I shall have occasion to show you presently, I take to be the new name of the Lord, to whose ancient name they had, in the time of their temptation, been faithful.

And then there is another thing to be noted about the

whole series of these promises, and that is, that through the first four of them, at all events, there is a very perceptible chronological progress. The first of them carries us back to the primeval state of man—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," and represents the future reward as being the renewal and perpetuation of that lost paradise. The second comes down a step in the history of humanity—"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death," and represents that future state as being the reversal of the curse and woe that came by sin. The third of them, which we are considering this morning, in one of its portions obviously, and in its other portion probably, advances still farther, referring to the wilderness history of the chosen people—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna," and sets forth that future as being the true possession of the spiritual and heavenly food. And then the fourth one alludes to the kingly epoch in Israel, and represents that future as being the fulfilment of what had been shadowed in David and David's son—"And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers."

This, then, being the general law of progress and reference to the ancient history as recurring in nobler form in the future experience, is there any way of connecting the obscure and enigmatical promise of my text with that general series? I think there is. There has been a great whirl of varying conjectures as to its force and meaning. The "white stone" has been spoken of

as being the symbol of acquittal, of election and choice, of admission to the heavenly banquet; all which may be true. But there is one objection at the very beginning to any such interpretations, namely, that they all are gathered from the circle of *heathen* associations, whereas the whole Apocalypse moves within the circle of *Jewish* symbols. So then, if we doubt as to the force of these and other similar interpretations, have we anything in the Jewish history, especially somewhere about the same period as the manna, which may help us? I think that an explanation which has been sometimes given seems to be commended by very many considerations. There was a precious stone, lustrous and resplendent—for that is the force of the word *white* here, not a dead white, but a brilliant coruscating white—on which there was something written, which no eye but one ever saw—that mysterious seat of revelation and direction known in the Old Testament by the name of Urim and Thummim (that is, lights and perfectnesses), enclosed within the folds of the High Priest's breast-plate, which none but the High Priest ever beheld. We may, perhaps, bring that ancient fact into connection with the promise in my text, and then it opens out into a whole world of suggestions with regard to the priestly dignity of the victors, with regard to the gift that is bestowed upon them, a hidden gift worn upon their breasts, and containing within it and inscribed upon it the Divine name, unseen by any eye but that of him that bears it. "No man knoweth the name saving he that receiveth," says our text; for "it," in our version, is a supplement. Receives what? What is the *it*? The name

—we instinctively suppose. The stone more accurately, perhaps. He that receives that receives with it the name, no doubt; but it is the possessor of the precious *jewel* that our text really says alone knows what is written thereon, even as the priestly possessor of the Urim and Thummim was the only person who knew the inscription. The stone is of secondary importance, and only comes into consideration as the vehicle for the real heart of the promised gift, which is the new name.

And then there is one other observation to be made. We usually take it for granted—for no good reason that I know of—that the new name here is the new name of the man to whom the stone with the name is given. Well, that seems a roundabout way, does it not, of saying that a man shall get a new name, to say that there shall be given to him a jewel with the name inscribed on it? That is one reason for doubting whether such is a correct interpretation. Another reason may be found in the fact that any references in the rest of the book, that seem to deal with a similar subject, distinctly tell us that the name to be possessed or borne by the perfected spirits is not in the first instance their own, but God's and Christ's. For instance, we read in the next chapter—"And I will write upon him the name of my God," "And I will write upon him *my* new name," and, in the last vision of all, "His servants serve him, and see his face, and *his* name shall be upon their foreheads." I incline to take these two last passages as substantially parallel and coincident with our text. I regard the promise which they contain as the key to this. So understood, the reference to the

High Priest's hidden jewel, with the ineffable name flashing upon it, receives additional force as symbolizing the reward given to the priestly conquerors—the possession in their perfected spirits of the new name, the name of God in Christ.

Thus, with these explanations, which have extended to a greater length than I proposed, let me try now to put before you what seem to me to be the thoughts contained in this great and wonderful promise.

I. I would say, carrying out my previous remarks—*That new Name is Christ's and ours.*

It is His first, it becomes ours by communication from Him. That is the representation uniformly given in Scripture with regard to all the change and glorifying of human nature which follows upon the entrance into the life beyond. It is ever set forth as being the consequence of a fuller knowledge and possession of the name—the manifested character of Jesus Christ our Lord. The words of the Apostle John, who wrote the Apocalypse, mean the same thing without metaphor, as his words here in their metaphor, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And we may expand this promise thus—it includes three things, Revelation, Assimilation, and Consecration.

"I will give him a new name"—a deeper, a more inward, a fresh knowledge and revelation of my own character—as eternal love, eternal wisdom, all-sufficient, absolute power, the home and treasure, and joy and righteousness of the whole heart and spirit.

And remember that this new name does not antiquate

our present knowledge. Dear brethren, we shall never get beyond the cross of Christ, as the highest manifestation of God. In heaven and in earth it is the chiefest medium of revelation of the Divine character, as the ever-giving and ever-loving Lord. The climax of all His work lies in that fact, eighteen hundred years back in the past. Concerning the depth of the motive from which it came, you and I have no lines that can fathom His heart—heaven alone will teach us what the cross means of the love of God. Concerning the rescue that it has effected, you and I have no present adequate means of knowing from what we have been delivered. We stand with averted eyes, as upon the edge of some great volcano, and see the swirling sulphur smoke, and the fierce flames flashing out from the yellow sides of the fiery pit below; but we see but little of what we have escaped from, nor know the dolefulness of the regions of alienation and rebellion and persistent rejection of God! Heaven will teach us what is the love of God by the revelation that it will give us of the depth of dismay and darkness that are found where men believe not in the love. The higher you rise upon the cliffs, the farther down into the abyss you can look; and, when we know what hell is, by the antithesis of heaven, we shall have a new vision, by what we win, of what we escaped when He took away the sting of death, and closed the gates of that dismal land! The cross remains for ever the revelation of the love of God; but in heaven we shall learn what we know not here—the full wealth which shall succeed the earnest of the inheritance, and, pos-

sessing the lustrous glories, we shall understand something more of the infinite mercy that has bought them for us. The sun remains the same, but as different as its sphere looks, seen from the comet at its aphelion, away out far beyond the orbits of the planets in the dim regions of that infinite abyss, and seen from the same orb at its perihelion when it circles round close by the burning brightness; so different does that mighty Sun of righteousness look to us now in His eternal self-revelation, by sacrifice and death, from what He will seem in that same self-revelation when we shall stand by His side!

And all this is not intended for one moment to deny that in addition to all that may come from change of position, from the development of new power, from the mere fact of having the history of life, our own, and our brethren's behind us, there will also be that of which we cannot speak—fresh effluxes of the Divine goodness, fresh manifestations of the Divine love and all-sufficiency. About that silence is our best speech. "We wait for the appearing of the great God, even our Saviour!" Only let us remember, as you may give to a man in the temperate or frigid zones the seeds of some tropical plant, that may perhaps grow and put forth some pale leaves and ineffectual blossoms, which yet will scarcely be worthy to be called leafage and flowerage, as compared with the broad, smooth foliage, and glowing brightness that the same seeds would evolve planted in their natural soil, so here into our hands, wanderers in inclement climes, God puts what I may call the exotic seeds—the knowledge of His love in Christ—and we tend them; and,

blessed be His name, they do grow beneath our cloudy skies, and amidst our long winters. But when we come to that higher house where these be planted, they shall flourish in a luxuriance and beauty undreamed of before —in new consciousness of His love, in new revelations of Christ's name, in new understanding and possession of the old name, ever new, yet ever the same.

And then, still further, on this new revelation of the name of Christ there follows as a consequence *assimilation* to the name which we possess, or, as the passage already quoted from John's Epistle puts it, transformation into the likeness of Him whom we behold. The gift of the name is such an inward revelation of Christ in His glory and perfectness as pre-supposes full sympathy with Him for its condition, and implies a still more thorough conformity to Him as its result. If His name be given to the victors, it cannot be theirs by any other means than a possession which is at once vision and participation. No mere perception of Christ's glory, as beyond and above, would satisfy the breadth of this great promise, if such unpossessing perception were possible. But it is not. We cannot know His name without sharing it. If we behold His glory we shall possess it, as the light must enter the eye for vision. There must, no doubt, be great physical changes in order to make us capable of that new light. But even these, marvellous as we have reason to believe they will be, are of less importance than those wondrous expansions of spiritual nature and perfectings of moral sympathy with our Saviour, which will follow the flooding of the soul with the light of His new

name. The light and the soul which receives will, as it were, act and re-act. The light beheld transforms. The soul transformed is capable of more light. That again flows in, and purifies and beautifies. Thus, in continuous reciprocal energy, the endless process of learning to know an Infinite Saviour, and becoming like a Perfect Lord, goes on with constant approximation, and yet with somewhat ever undisclosed. The gift is not once for all, but is continuous through eternity.

We shall become like Christ by knowing Him. We shall know Him by getting like Him. The water of life takes the shape of the containing vessel, but it has likewise the property of dilating the spirit into which it flows, and, by fruition, enlarging capacity, and hence kindling desire. The sun shines upon the sensitive plate, and an image of the sun is photographed there.

The name received becomes ours by Christ's communication. His new name is His servants' new name, according to the deep mystery hidden in the ancient word of symbolic prophecy, which applies to Jerusalem and its King the same designation, and says in the one breath, "This is the name by which *He* shall be called, the Lord our righteousness;" and in the other, "This is the name by which *Zion* shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." "So, also," says the Apostle, is Christ," meaning thereby not the personal Redeemer, but the total sum of the spirits redeemed by His grace, incorporated by living union into Himself, sharers of His likeness, and transformed by His glory.

Then there is a third idea implied in this promise, if the

new name be Christ's, and that is possession or *consecration.*

His name is given, that is, His character is revealed. His character is imparted, and further, by the gift He takes as well as gives, He takes us for His even in giving Himself to be ours. It is a sign of ownership and authority to impose one's name—"They call their lands after their own names." As a man writes his name upon the fly leaf of his books, or stamps his initials on his valuables, so Christ gives His name in token of proprietorship, and builds on that fact at once the assurance of protection and the demand for service. "Bring my sons from far, even every one that is called by my name, for I have created him for my glory." The slave is branded with the letters of his owner's name. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," and the letters which are here burned in by hot irons will yonder be filled with lustrous gold, and the ownership which on earth was testified by suffering will in heaven be manifested in glory. The High Priest's mitre bore on its front "Holiness to the Lord," and one of the last and highest promises of Scripture is cast in the form supplied by the symbol of Aaron's office and honour, "his servants shall serve him"—in priestly service, that is—"and they shall see his face." Action and contemplation, so hard to harmonize here, shall blend at last. "And his name shall be in their foreheads," the token of His possession, manifest for all eyes to behold. And thus, when we behold Him we become like Him; and in the measure which we become like Him we belong to Him; not one

step farther. That in us which is not transformed hath no part in Christ. That in us which belongs to Him is identified in sympathy, in feeling, in moral character with Him. When our minds think His thoughts, and are occupied with His truth, then they are His, in so far as "we have the mind of Christ." When our hearts love His loves, then they are His in so far as they throb in sympathy. When our wills go out in the direction of His purposes, then they are His in so far as the touch of His finger upon the keys in the heavens moves the tremulous needles of our volitions upon the earth. We belong to Him in the measure in which we are like Him. He possesses us in the measure in which we possess His name, which is His revealed self.

II. Such, then, being a general outline of the main ideas of the promise itself, let me ask you to look, secondly, at the other thought which is here, namely, that *this new name is unknown except by its possessor.*

That, of course, is true in all regions of human experience. Did ever anybody describe a taste so that a man that had not tasted the thing could tell what it was like? Did ever anybody describe an odour so as to do more than awaken the memory of someone who had once had the scent lingering on his nostrils? Have all the poets who have been singing from the beginning of the world described love and sorrow, joy and hope, and fear, so as to do more than kindle the reminiscences of men as to their own sorrows and joys? If we have not known the love of a child, no talking will ever make a man understand what a father's heart is. Religious experiences

are not unlike ordinary human experiences in this matter. It is not possible to communicate them, partly by reason of the imperfection of human language, partly by reason that you need in all departments sympathy and prior knowledge in order to make the descriptions significant at all.

And in our earthly life, though your faith and mine, dear brethren, and our joys and our consciousness of Christ's love are all weak and tremulous, as we know, still we cannot speak them fully out; and if we could, there are no ears to hear except the ears of those who are possessors of like precious faith. The law applies to the heavens as well. Not till we get there shall we know. The text seems to imply what is more wonderful still, that though there shall be no isolation in heaven, which is the perfection of society, there may be incommunicable depths of blessed experience even there. Though appearance and reality shall accurately coincide—though stammering words, breathed through the vehicle of language which has its roots in the material and the sensuous, and so never lends itself kindly to spiritual things, shall have passed away—still there may be words impossible for a man to utter; for each eye shall see its own brightness in God—and amongst the "solemn troops and sweet societies" of heaven, knit together in a closeness of sympathy and union of which we have no experience upon earth, there shall still subsist diversities and distinctions. Each man standing at his own angle will see his own side of the light; it will be enough and the same for all, and yet different in each. "No man knoweth saving he that receiveth." We must possess to

understand; we must stand before the throne to apprehend, and after countless ages we shall have to say—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

III. Finally, my text gives us the condition and the true cause of possessing this new nature. *The new name is won and given.*

It comes as the reward of victory; it comes as a bestowment from Christ: "To him that *overcometh* will I *give*." And it seems to me that we have much need of trying to unite these two thoughts more closely together than we generally do. The victory is a condition. It is not anything more than a condition. People talk about heaven, about the glories there, as though they were the natural outcome and consequence of a certain course of life upon earth. By no means. That is only a very fragmentary truth. Without such a course, or rather without the disposition that underlies such a course, they are not attainable, but the course is only a condition. The real cause is Christ's bestowment. I believe as thoroughly as any man can in the application of the idea of reward to Christian service, but I believe that this is a secondary idea, and that the primary one is "The *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." I believe that all outward discipline, and labour, and sorrows, and disappointments, and struggles, the efforts that we make after victory, that all these prepare Christians, and make us capable of receiving the gift. I believe that the gift comes only out of His infinite and undeserved, and, God be thanked! inexhaustible forgiving goodness and

mercy. The one is, if I may so say, the preparing of the cloth for the dye, and after that you have the application of the colour. No heaven except to the victor. The victor does not fight his way into heaven, but Christ gives it to him. And when you and I stand as, God be thanked! we may hope to stand before that throne, we shall forget all about rewardableness and reward, and say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, unto thy name" we give glory. Thou dost give me the grace to fight; thou dost teach my hands to war; thou dost cover my head in the day of battle; it is thine own grace in me that thou dost crown. Thou art first, and last, and all—the motive and the strength of the conflict, the reward and the rewarder of the victory. All, Lord! all that I have is thine, and mine is only weakness, and sin, and defeat.

Dear brethren, make your choice. Fight you must. Are you going to win or be beaten? Make your choice of the image you must bear. Whose? "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Loving confidence in that Divine Lord, whose name is the clearest utterance for earth and heaven of the name of God, and in whom our impotence is omnipotence, strengthens us for the battle, and will crown us at the last. They that know Him and love Him shall be like Him, and they that are like Him shall possess in their deepest souls the joy that in Heaven shall be unspeakable and full of glory. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

SERMON VII.

"SO DID NOT I."

A WORD TO THE YOUNG.

NEHEMIAH V, 15.

So did not I, because of the fear of God.

THERE are few nobler characters, even among the many noble ones of the Old Testament, than Nehemiah, the leader of the restored exiles. He was no prophet—he was no priest—he made no pretension to possessing a Divine commission, but he was a devout, resolute, sagacious man, with the fear of God in his soul and Jerusalem graven on his inmost heart! Prompt and practical, and with a strong dash of organizing, governmental instinct, there was yet a vein of poetry in him. He was bold and cautious, prudent yet daring, full of ready resource, able to hold his tongue and bide his time; and deep down below all this, there was a great fountain of enthusiasm, which was called forth by the thoughts of God and of his land lying in desolation and ruin.

These touching words from his autobiography which I have read to you have immediate reference to a very small matter, but yet they let us into the secret of a great

part of his character. His predecessors, the representatives of a foreign dominion, had been in the habit of making a gain of their office, or at least charging the maintenance of the cost of their court and household to the people already impoverished and ground down by exactions. Against this practice he makes a stand. It was a little thing, but Nehemiah brought a great principle to bear upon it; and though, says he, it was a legitimate source of gain and a recognized custom, though all my predecessors had done it, and though there was nothing but a sentiment to stand in the way of my doing it, yet *I* could not do it because—I feared God.

And thus we get from the simple words such great thoughts as these. How the loftiest motive may regulate the smallest duties. How religious principle, as we call it in our abstract way, or "The fear of God," as Nehemiah called it, how that may interpenetrate, *will* interpenetrate, and run through all life, and find a field for its noblest exercise in the midst of commonplace and secular duties! How, wheresoever that principle is strong and vigorous, a man will have to make up his mind to sturdy non-compliance, to dare to be singular, to be unlike the maxims and examples of the people round about him, and how every good man will have to make up his mind to give up a great many sources of gain and profit and pleasure and advantage for no more tangible reason than because a more sensitive conscience makes that which other men can do without winking, if I may so say, a crime intolerable to him.

It is possible, young men and women, to "make the

most of both worlds;" but all true religion will keep a man back from a great many things which "the world" thinks "the best" that it has. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." I think, then, I may venture to take these words, dismissing altogether now any further reference to their immediate occasion, as the basis of some very simple and matter of course, but, I hope, earnest and sincere appeals and exhortations to my younger friends who have come here to-night to listen to me.

I. First, let me put the main principle that lies here in these words: *Nothing will go right unless you dare to be singular.* "So did not *I*."

Howsoever common the practice, howsoever innocent and recognized the source of gain, the multitude that approved it, and adopted it, was nothing to me; I had to stand on my own feet, and look through my own eyes, and be guided by my own conscience, and make my own choice, because I had to answer for it at the last. Everything will be wrong where a man has not learnt—and the sooner you begin to learn it the better for your lives here and yonder—the great art of saying "No."

I suppose I need not remind you that in all regions of life, and in many into which I have not the slightest intention of going to-night, that habit, in various forms, lies at the bottom of all that is worthy and noble and great and good, and its opposite leads to all that is ignoble, weak, and erroneous. In the field of opinion, the lazy acquiescence with which men hand their ready-made cut-and-dried theories and thoughts from one to another, and never "look the gift-horse in the mouth," but swallow

the thing whole, for no better reason than that contained in the cowardly old proverb that "What everybody says must be true," is the fruitful source of error, hypocrisy, weakness, and misery. Youth is the time to form opinions—or rather to learn truth. It is meant that you should now, with the honest use of all the power you can command, canvass and decide upon the Babel of varying beliefs around you. That spirit of inquiry which is so often condemned in you, may, indeed, degenerate into self-conceited rejection of things ordinarily believed, or into mere love of singularity, or into contented doubt of all high truth; but if it be absent in youth there will be no real certitude in age. No man has any belief but what he wins for himself as the captive of his own spear and his own bow. If we are building on traditional opinion, we have really no foundation at all. Unless the word received from others has been verified by ourselves, and changed, as it were, into a part of our own being, we may befool ourselves with creeds and professions to which we fancy that we adhere, but we have no belief whatsoever. You must learn to look with your own eyes, and not through the spectacles of any human guides, authorities, or teachers upon the mystic, awful verities of this strange life, and upon the light that falls on them from the far-off empyrean above.

But these are not the thoughts to which I especially wish to direct you. The chief field for the exercise of this resolute non-compliance with common practice is in the region of moral action, in the daily conduct of your lives. There it is most needful that you should take this

for your motto, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Beginning life as you are, you have already found out, no doubt, how many people there are round about you, who are beacons rather than examples, and how many beckoning hands and enticing voices seek to draw you away. You have no doubt felt—and, perhaps, some of you have gone far enough away to smile at yourselves when you remember—the shock of surprise and pain when first, issuing, it may have been, from the sheltered nest of your father's house and the companionship of a mother's purity, you plunged into this rough world, and found yourselves in actual contact with people such as you had only heard of before—with profligates or scoffers, and when you heard with your own ears lightly spoken words of unbelief and wickedness, loose talk and unclean jesting. The shock cannot last long. What comes after it? Has it been compliance or resistance?

Let me remind you how surely *he who yields is wrecked and ruined.* The absolute necessity for this sturdy resistance is plain from the very make of our own natures. There is a host of inclinations and desires in every man, which will hurry him to destruction unless he has a strong hand on the brake. "God gave them to thee under lock and key"—and it is at our peril that we let them have sway. "I do it because I choose" is the fool's reason, and it is as fatal as foolish.

The same necessity is enforced if you think of the order of things in which we dwell. We are set in the midst of a world full of things which are both attractive

and bad, and which, therefore, alluring though they may be to some part of our nature, are sternly prohibited by wisdom and lovingly forbidden by God. And if you go careering among the flowers and fruits that grow around you in the life that is opening before you, like town children turned loose for a day in the woods, picking whatever is bright and tasting whatever looks as if it would be sweet, you will poison yourselves with night-shade and hemlock.

But chiefly the need of saying "No" is enforced by the fact that every one of us is thrown more or less closely into contact with people who, themselves, are living as they should not, and who would fain drag us after them.

Young men! you know how much of that devil's work is done in pretty nearly every counting-house and ware-house in Manchester, every day of the week! You know how many there are that curl up their lips to a sneer at you if you shyly venture to speak the maxims that your fathers' teaching and your mothers' entreaties may have written on your hearts.

You know how many there are that say to you, sometimes by articulate words, and still more frequently by example, "Come with us. Cast in your lot with us. Won't you go with us to-night to the theatre? Won't you go with us to-morrow to some other haunt of dissipation? What's the use of being straight-laced? Let's have our fling. Time enough to be better when we get old. No harm in sowing your wild oats now. All those old women's notions you have brought from home with

you, get rid of them." Most of you will understand what I mean when I say that, if a young man comes into this city, and takes his place at desk or counter, or on the benches of Owens College, and there forgets resistance, sturdy non-compliance, and heroic daring to be singular when evil tempts him, he is ruined body and soul.

That is not exaggeration, as anybody who watches for a few years has sorrowful reason to know. I have no doubt that you could name instances of young men in your places of business—I could name many whom I have seen, some of them once occupants of these pews. I have seen them from the day that they entered their situations, fresh and buoyant, "innocent of much transgression," and "simple concerning evil." And I have watched them grow hard and reserved, gradually withdraw themselves from good and Christian influences, exchange their simplicity for knowledge which was bitter, sometimes become pale and haggard and old before their time—and then they have disappeared. "Where is he gone?" "Oh, he got into a bad set; he has lost his situation, and is gone abroad." And sometimes the answer is: "Did you not know? he went home ill—and he is dead." Like some pleasure boat that runs out of harbour with a careless crew, flags flying and laughter sounding, and before she has well cleared the port is smashed to pieces on the black shelf of rocks, half hid by the sunny waters as they break over it in dancing foam. The lesson that is read you by these sad careers cut so short is surely that one—"Resist." "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

Do not let yourselves be laughed out of your reverence for this book, and the God that it tells you of! Do not let yourselves be coaxed or ridiculed into touching forbidden pleasures! Do not let yourselves be talked, or frightened, or swayed by the mere mass of evil example out of your true path, as the remoter planets may be perturbed in their orbits by that huge body which moves where the light is feeblest on the outer verge of the system! Stand fast on your own ground. If need be, take the grand old words for yours, which may be as nobly illustrated in the privacies of our narrow lives as they were in the Diet of Worms: "Here I stand, I can do naught else. God help me. Amen." And if all around be unfriendly and it be hard to resist alone, remember—"I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

And there are others of my congregation this evening less advanced in life to whom I would say the same thing. I see boys and girls here, home from school, perhaps, on whose hearts I would fain leave the same impression. You, children, know how in your little world—little as it seems to us, big as it seems to you—it is often very difficult not to follow companions and schoolfellows when they are doing wrong. I believe that it is harder for you than for us older people to bear being laughed at, and not to do what everybody else is doing. It is harder for you than for us to look past what is round about you. But you know quite well that there are things done and said at school and in the playground that you would not like your father or mother to hear. Your Father in heaven hears them though, and that is

worse. Do not you be ashamed to say "No" when you are asked to make one in such things. When anybody says to you, "Come, there's no harm in it," you may, generally, be sure that there *is* harm. You, too, have to fight a good fight, and to begin early to refuse to follow a multitude to do evil. You cannot begin too soon.

For us all, then, in every period of life, the necessity is the same. We must learn to say "No." We must dare, if need be, to be singular. Like the young Joseph, when you are tempted astray by seducing voices, let your answer be, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Like the young Daniel, when forbidden pleasures and questionable delights are urged upon your appetites, be "purposed in" your "heart that" you "will not defile" yourself with them, and choose pulse and water with the relish of a good conscience rather than such dainties. Like the same Daniel, when the crowd are flocking at the sound of the sackbut and psaltery to worship some golden image, keep your knees unbent amidst the madness, learn to stand erect though you alone are upright in the midst of a grovelling multitude, and protest, "We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Like Nehemiah, dare to lose money rather than adopt sources of profit which others may use without a thought, but which your conscience shrinks from; and to all the various enticements of pleasure, and gain, and ease, and popular loose maxims for the conduct, oppose immovable resistance founded on a higher law and a mightier motive—"So did not I, because of the fear of God."

But still further, remember that not only does easy yielding to these enticements bring all sorts of moral confusion and failure into a man's life, but that *such compliance is in itself weak and unworthy.*

The appeal which I have been making to conscience may fall comparatively powerless on some of you. Perhaps one of another sort may have force. Surely, then, I may urge this consideration—what a shame it is that a man possessed of that awful power which, within limits and subject to conditions, God has given him, of shaping and determining his character, should let himself be shaped and determined by the mere pressure of circumstances and accidental associations! What a shame it is, that a man should have no more volition in what he does and in what he refrains from than one of those gelatinous creatures that float about in the ocean, which have to move wherever the current takes them, though it be to cast them upon the rocky shore with an ebbing tide! Surely you are fit for something better than that! Surely it was not meant that you and I should passively receive and yield to any outward impulses. Modern theorists seem to think so—"Circumstances make character!" The theory has its vindication, alas! in the actual lives of the great bulk of men; but that that should be so is only another proof of the weakness and depravity of humanity, in which the will is paralyzed, and the conscious choice is so seldom exercised, and a man lets the world do what it likes with him. How many of us are conscious of yielding ourselves up to the influences round about us, with no better reasons than because they are

there! You take on the colour of what you feed on! Is that what God gave you a will for? You yield to the maxims that are common. Is it for that that God put a pair of eyes into your head and a brain into your skull? You take the course of life that is forced upon you. Is that what you have got a conscience for, that you should be like those creatures in the lowest region of organized life, whom the microscopist makes visible by feeding with some coloured material which absorb and tinges their whole filmy unsubstantial organization? And so you get the colour of what you live upon. The world is your mistress and makes what it likes of you. "With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.' Surely there is nothing walks the earth more contemptible, as well as more certainly evil, than a man that lets himself be made by whatever force may happen to be strongest near him, and, fastening up his helm and unshipping his oars, is content to be blown about by every vagrant wind, and rolled in the trough of each curling wave.

Let us say, finally, on this part of my subject, that another very solemn consideration may be suggested, enforcing the need of this vigorous non-compliance with the temptations around us, from the remembrance *of what a poor excuse for wrong doing they will be found to be at last!*

"The inducements were there, and I yielded to them."

It is the old story. "The woman tempted me, and I did eat." Yes, and the woman has to bear part of the blame. But how about "*I did eat?*" Was there anything in the temptation to compel that? Was there any such mingling up of the two wills, as that because she was wrong you must needs be so too? Was there any confusion of individuality in that fashion? Is there any such a transference of responsibility as that a man can truly say, "Oh, it was not my fault—I was tempted?" Yes, you were tempted. Of course, we are all that. "It was not my fault!" *Whose was it?* Did this profligate fellow-clerk at the next desk *make* you go into that public house? Did that other one *make* you stain your purity? Did these associates *compel* you, young man or woman! to run with them into the paths of evil? Did that classmate, schoolboy or girl! *force* you to do wrong? "Every one of us shall give account of *himself* to God," and as for the companions and tempters, "They shall flee every one of them to his quarter" (as the prophet has it about the evil allies of the evil city, when it came to its ruin)—"and none shall save thee!" Every man shall bear his own burden. Alone we shall stand before God! Let us have the courage to be alone here, and, when necessary, say, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

II. And now there is another consideration to which I ask your attention. If such thoughts as those I have been submitting to you, imperfect as they are upon so great a subject, may yet be taken as something like sufficient vindication of the principle, that for all worthy, noble life, sturdy non-compliance and resistance is an

absolute necessity, then there comes a second consideration:

You cannot resist the evil around you unless you give yourselves to God. "So did not I, *because of the fear of God.*"

I need not dwell upon the explanation of that phrase. I suppose none of us will misunderstand what is meant by it. No slavish dread, no mere far-off reverence, but a living regard for Him, which is at once fear and love, which sways, and fills, and purifies the soul. We put it, as I said, into more abstract form, but gain nothing thereby, when we say this resistance must be based upon "religious principle." We put it into a more distinctly New Testament form (not in the slightest degree varying the essential force and meaning), when we say this resistance must be based upon, and flow from, faith and love directed to Jesus Christ. The fear of God in the Old Testament corresponds precisely to the more fully developed faith and love to Christ, who is the express image of the Divine person and the communicator to us of the Divine strength, upon whom we have to cast ourselves! God in Christ, trusted in, loved, reverenced, obeyed, imitated,—God in Christ alone strengthens a man for this resistance and non-compliance!

I need not spend your time in pointing out to you what we all know well enough already, how "by strength shall no man prevail." How, in our own power we cannot successfully nor completely resist the evil influences that pour in upon us. We never have been, and so we may safely conclude that we never shall be, able to do so by our own power. You have tried it, how have you got

on? Each man's experience in this matter is a transcript of every other's, as face answereth to face in a glass. And each man's experience is the same dreary record of partial success in checking some single specific manifestation of evil, and of entire failure in dealing with the deep source from which these come. The first lesson taught by all honest attempts to put in practice that commonplace of all morality on which I have been insisting, is the need of a firm anchorage without us, if we are not to drift on a lee shore. We must be made fast to something that is fast, if we are not to be swept like thistledown before the wind. It is easy to say "resist," but the command is bitter irony unless we go on to say with the New Testament, "Whom resist steadfast in the faith." No man, my dear brother, can stand in the slippery places where we have to go, unless he have the grasp of a higher and stronger hand to keep him up. No man will ever for a life-time resist and repel the domination of evil unless he is girded about with the purity of Jesus Christ, as an atmosphere in which all poisonous things fade and die, and through which no temptation can force its way. The only means for this steadfast resistance is a steadfast faith in Jesus as our Saviour. He has assured us that He will give us the victory. "Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." In the strength of this promise I have the right to come to the feeblest here and say, "However you may be encompassed by evil, however you may be drawn aside by evil example and harming associations, however difficult it may be for you to keep

your footing in the midst of the rush and swirl of that great tide of sin, here is a hand that you may grasp, and grasping will be strong." And that, for three reasons, each of which is mighty, and all of which, taken together, are omnipotent.

In Christ we have an all-sufficient *pattern*. I have been saying it is at our peril that we imitate men. There is a *man* whom it is safe and blessed and noble and peace and love and perfectness to imitate—the man, Christ Jesus. There is a man to whom all the instincts which lead us to follow the example of men around us, and which so often lead us astray, may be directed without fear, yea, rather with the happiest results. There is no need why we should seek in any other a pattern when we can read, "Leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." "So did not I, because of the fear of God." So *did* I, because my Master had done it before me. The one command which contains the whole of Christian duty, the whole law of moral perfectness attainable by man, is, "Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk as Christ hath walked."

That fear of God, which is all transfused and mingled with the love of Him, gives us, next, all-powerful *motive*. Love delights to please; fear dreads to disobey; and when the pressure strong and constant of these examples round about us is forcing itself in upon us, we have but to think of a mightier Companion, whose smile is better than all other approbations, whose condemnation is a pain that no other approval can ever efface. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

And, finally, the fear of God strengthens us for resistance, because it gives us an omnipotent *power* within ourselves whereby we resist. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." We are not left to the following of an example that is set us from afar. That is the baldest notion, a mere humanitarian notion of the influence of Christ and His work. We are not left to the influence of the motives of love and fear built upon the recognition of His sacrifice, great and blessed as these motives are that is a less imperfect, but still an imperfect, conception of the Gospel. The whole truth embraces both of these, and adds to them that mighty fact that we have a Divine helper breathing His grace and strength into us We have, therefore, not merely to urge you to imitate the example of Christ, nor only to commend to your faith the love of Christ as manifested on the cross, that it may subdue by its constraining influences the hardness and loftiness of our own evil hearts, but we have to point to Christ who died for us as the source of all our hope and the sacrifice for all our sins, and the all-powerful motive of loving obedience; to Christ who lived among us as the perfect Ideal of manhood; to Christ who is exalted at God's right hand as shedding forth this wondrous gift of a sanctifying Spirit, in whose strength we are strong, and by whose help we can resist. Therefore, because, apart from Christ, we have no wholly trustworthy guide for even the most honest efforts, nor any motive powerful enough to counterwork the baser inducements which the world offers to drag us down by,

nor any inward power to lift ourselves by ourselves—a feat as impossible in moral as in bodily gymnastics—therefore, if we seek to resist, we must be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."

Do not you go on this warfare at your own charges, nor while you are but putting on the armour boast yourself as he that putteth it off. If you do, you will certainly be beaten, and led away from the field a prisoner. Forsaking self, trust yourself wholly to Christ, and having yielded your soul to Him as a sinful creature who needs pardon for the past as well as power for the future, let His love sway your heart, and His example be your mark, and His Spirit your strength. As the secret of all negative forbearance from evil take for your watchword, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." As the secret of all positive allegiance to God, let your motto be, "The love of Christ constraineth me." Then the noble picture of what a youthful soul may be will be fulfilled in you—"Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one."

Wilt thou not from this time say, "My Father! Thou art the guide of my youth"?

SERMON VIII.

A DARK PICTURE AND A BRIGHT HOPE.

EPHESIANS iv, 22.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

IF a doctor knows that he can cure a disease, he can afford to give full weight to its gravest symptoms. If he knows he cannot, he is sorely tempted to say it is of slight importance, and, though it cannot be cured, can be endured without much discomfort.

And so the Scripture teachings about man's real moral condition are characterized by two peculiarities which, at first sight, seem somewhat opposed, but are really harmonious and closely connected. There is no book and no system in the whole world that takes such a dark view of what you and I are; there is none animated with so bright and confident a hope of what you and I may become. And, on the other hand, the common run of thought amongst men minimizes the fact of sin. But when you say, "Well, be it big or little, can I get rid of it anyhow?" there is no answer to give that is worth listening to. Christ alone can venture to tell men what

they are, because Christ alone can radically change their whole nature and being. There are certain diseases of which a constant symptom is unconsciousness that there is anything the matter. A deep-seated wound does not hurt much. The question is not whether Christian thoughts about a man's condition are gloomy or not, but whether they are true. As to their being gloomy, it seems to me that the people who complain of our doctrine of human nature, as giving a melancholy view of men, do really take a far more melancholy one. We believe in a fall, and we believe in a possible and actual restoration. The man to whom evil is not an intrusive usurper can have no confidence that it will ever be expelled. Which is the gloomy system—that which paints in undisguised blackness the facts of life, and over against their blackest darkness the radiant light of a great hope shining bright and glorious, or one that paints humanity in a uniform monotone of indistinguishable grey involving the past, the present, and the future—which, believing in no disease, hopes for no cure? My text, taken in conjunction with the grand words which follow, about "The new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness," brings before us some very solemn views (which the men that want them most realize the least) with regard to what we are, what we ought to be and cannot be, and what, by God's help, we may become. The old man is "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," says Paul. *There* are a set of characteristics, then, of the universal sinful human self. Then there comes a hopeless commandment—a mockery—if we are to stop with

it, "put it off." And then there dawns on us the blessed hope and possibility of the fulfilment of the injunction, when we learn that "the truth in Jesus" is, that we put off the old man with his deeds. Such is a general outline of the few thoughts I have to suggest to you.

I. I wish to fix, first of all, upon the very significant, though brief, outline sketch of the *facts of universal sinful human nature* which the Apostle gives here.

These are three, upon which I dilate for a moment or two. "The old man" is a Pauline expression, about which I need only say here that we may take it as meaning that form of character and life which is common to us all apart from the great change operated through faith in Jesus Christ. It is universal, it is sinful. There is a very remarkable contrast, which you will notice, between the verse upon which I am now commenting and the following one. The *old* man is set over against the *new*. One is *created*, the other is *corrupted*, as the word might be properly rendered. The one is created after God, the other is rotting to pieces under the influence of its lusts. The one consists of righteousness and holiness, which have their root in *truth;* the other is under the dominion of passions and desires, which, in themselves evil, are the instruments of and are characterized by *deceit*.

The first of the characteristics, then, of this sinful self, to which I wish to point for a moment is, that every Christless life, whatsoever the superficial differences in it, is really a life shaped according to and under the influence of *passionate desires*. You see I venture to

alter one word of my text, and that for this simple reason: the word "lusts" has, in modern English, assumed a very much narrower signification than either that of the original has, or than itself had in English when this translation was made. It is a very remarkable testimony, by the by, to the weak point in the bulk of men—to the side of their nature which is most exposed to assaults—that this word, which originally meant strong desire of any kind, should, by the observation of the desires that are strongest in the mass of people, have got to be restricted and confined to the one specific meaning of strong animal, fleshly, sensuous desires. It may point a lesson to some of my congregation, and especially to the younger portion of the men in it. Remember, my brother, that the part of your nature which is closest to the material is likewise closest to the animal, and is least under dominion (without a strong and constant effort) of the power which will save the flesh from corruption, and make the material the vehicle of the spiritual and divine. Many a young man comes into Manchester—and there are some of them in this chapel now—with the atmosphere of a mother's prayers and a father's teaching round about him; with holy thoughts and good resolutions beginning to sway his heart and spirit; and flaunting profligacy, and seducing tongues beside him in the counting house, in the warehouse, and at the shop counter, lead him away into excesses that banish all these, and, after a year or two of riot and sowing to the flesh, he of the flesh reaps corruption. And that very literally—in sunken eye, and trembling hand, and hacking cough

and a grave opened for him before his time. Ah, my dear young friends! "they promise them liberty." It is a fine thing to get out of your father's house, and away from the restrictions of the society where you are known, and loving eyes—or unloving ones—are watching you. It is a fine thing to get into the freedom and irresponsibility of a big city! "They promise them liberty," and "they themselves become the bond slaves of corruption."

But, then, that is only the grossest and the lowest form of the truth that is here. Paul's indictment against us is not anything so exaggerated and extreme as that the animal nature predominates in all who are not Christ's. That is not true, and is not what my text says. But what it says is just this: that, given the immense varieties of tastes and likings and desires which men have, the point and characteristic feature of every godless life is that, be these what they may, they become the dominant power in that life. He does not, of course, deny that the sway and tyranny of such lusts and desires are sometimes broken by remonstrances of conscience; sometimes suppressed by considerations of prudence; sometimes by habit, by business, by circumstances that force people into channels into which they would not naturally let their lives run. He does not deny that often and often in such a life there will be a dim desire for something better—that high above the black and tumbling ocean of that life of corruption and disorder, there lies a calm heaven with great stars of duty shining in it. He does not deny that men are a law to themselves, as well as a bundle of desires which they obey;—

but what he charges upon us, and what I venture to bring as an indictment against you, and myself too, is this: that apart from Christ it is not conscience that rules our lives; that apart from Christ it is not sense of duty that is strongest; that apart from Christ the real directing impulse to which the inward proclivities, if not the outward activities, do yield in the main and on the whole, is, as this text says, the things that we like, the passionate desires of nature, the sensuous and godless heart.

And you say, "Well, if it is so, what harm is it? Did not God make me with these desires, and am not I meant to gratify them?" Yes, certainly. The harm of it is, first of all, this, that it is an inversion of the true order. The passionate desires about which I am speaking, be they for money, be they for fame, or be they for any other of the gilded baits of worldly joys—these passionate dislikes and likings, as well as the purely animal ones—the longing for food, for drink, for any other physical gratification,—these were never meant to be men's guides. They are meant to be impulses. They have got motive power, but no directing power. Do you start engines out of the Victoria Station without drivers or rails to run upon? It would be as reasonable as that course of life which men pursue who say, "Thus I wish; thus I command; let my desire stand in the place of other argumentation and reason." They take that part of their nature that is meant to be under the guidance of reason and conscience looking up to God, and put it in the supreme place, and so, setting a beggar on horseback, ride where we know such equestrians are said in the end to go!

The desires are meant to be impelling powers. It is absurdity and the destruction of true manhood to make them, as we so often do, directing powers, and to put the reins into their hand. They are the wind, not the helm; the steam, not the driver. Let us keep things in their right places. Remember that the constitution of human nature, as God has meant it, is this: down there, under hatches, under control, the strong impulses; above them, the enlightened understanding; above that, the conscience—that has a loftier region than that of thought to move in, the moral region; and above that, the God, whose face, shining down upon the apex of the nature thus constituted, irradiates it with light which filters through all the darkness, down to the very base of the being; and sanctifies the animal, and subdues the impulses, and enlightens the understandings, and calms and quickens the conscience, and makes ductile and pliable the will, and fills the heart with fruition and tranquillity, and orders the life after the image of Him that created it.

I cannot dwell any longer upon this first point; but I hope that I have said enough, not to show that the words are true—that is a very poor thing to do, if that was all that I aimed at—but to bring them home to some of our hearts and consciences. I pray God to impress the conviction that, although there be in us all the voice of conscience, which all of us more or less have tried at intervals to follow; yet in the main it abides for ever true—and it is true, my dear brethren, about you—a Christless life is a life under the dominion of tyrannous desires.

Ask yourself what I cannot for you, Is it I? My hand fumbles about the hinges and handle of the door of the heart. You yourself must open it and let conviction come in!

Still further, the words before us add another touch to this picture. They not only represent the various passionate desires as being the real guides of "the old man," but they give this other characteristic—that these desires are in their very nature the *instruments of deceit* and lies.

The words of my text are, perhaps, rather enfeebled by the form of rendering which our translators have here, as in many cases, thought proper to adopt. If, instead of reading "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," we read "corrupt according to the desires of deceit," we should have got not only the contrast between the old man and the new man, "created in righteousness and holiness of *truth*"—but we should have had, perhaps, a clearer notion of the characteristic of these lusts, which the Apostle meant to bring into prominence. These desires are, as it were, the tools and instruments by which deceit betrays and mocks men; the weapons used by illusions and lies to corrupt and mar the soul. They are strong, and their nature is to pursue after their objects without regard to any consequences beyond their own gratification; but, strong as they are, they are like the blinded Samson, and will pull the house down on themselves if they be not watched. Their strength is excited on false pretences. They are stirred to grasp what is after all a lie. They are "desires of deceit."

That just points to the truth of all such life being hollow and profitless. If regard be had to the whole scope of our nature and necessities, and to the true aim of life as deduced therefrom, nothing is more certain than that no man will get the satisfaction that his ruling passions promise him, by indulging them. It is very plain that the way never to get what you need and desire, is always to do what you like.

And that for very plain reasons. Because, for one thing, the object only satisfies for a time. Yesterday's food appeased our hunger for the day, but we wake hungry again. And the desires which are not so purely animal have the same characteristic of being stilled for the moment, and of waking more ravenous than ever. "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Because, further, the desire grows and the object of it does not. The fierce longing increases, and, of course, the power of the thing that we pursue to satisfy it decreases in the same proportion. It is a fixed quantity; the appetite is indefinitely expansible. And so, the longer I go on feeding my desire, the more I long for the food; and the more I long for it, the less taste it has when I get it. It must be more strongly spiced to titilate a jaded palate. And there soon comes to be an end of the possibilities in that direction. A man scarcely tastes his brandy, and has little pleasure in drinking it, but he cannot do without it, and so he gulps it down in bigger and bigger draughts till delirium tremens comes in to finish it. Because, for another thing, after all, these desires are each but a fragment of whole nature,

and when one is satisfied another is baying to be fed. The grim brute, like the watchdog of the old mythology, has three heads, and each gaping for honey cakes. And if they were all gorged, there are other longings in men's nature that will not let them rest, and for which all the leeks and onions of Egypt are not food. So long as these are unmet, you "spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not."

So we may lay it down as a universal truth, that whoever takes it for his law to do as he likes will not for long like what he does. Or, as George Herbert says,

> "Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,
> Embroider'd lies, nothing between two dishes—
> These are the pleasures here."

Do any of you remember the mournful words with which one of our greatest modern writers of fiction closes his saddest, truest book: "Ah! *vanitas vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?" No wonder that with such a view of human life as that, the next and last sentence should be, "Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out." Yes! if there be nothing more to follow than the desires which deceive, man's life, with all its bustle and emotion, is a subject for cynical and yet sad regard, and all the men and women that toil and fret are "merely players."

Then, again, one more point in this portraiture of "the old man," is that *these deceiving desires corrupt.* The language of our text conveys a delicate shade of meaning which is somewhat blurred in our version. Properly, it

speaks of "the old man which is *growing* corrupt" rather than "which is corrupt," and expresses the steady advance of that inward process of decay and deterioration which is ever the fate of a life subordinated to these desires. And this growing evil, or rather inward eating corruption which disintegrates and destroys a soul, is contrasted in the subsequent verse with the "new man which is *created* in righteousness." There is in the one the working of life, in the other the working of death. The one is formed and fashioned by the loving hands and quickening breath of God; the other is gradually and surely rotting away by the eating leprosy of sin. For the former the end is eternal life; for the latter the second death.

And the truth that underlies that awful representation is the familiar one to which I have already referred in another connection, that, by the very laws of our nature, by the plain necessities of the case, all our moral qualities, be they good or bad, tend to increase by exercise. In whatever direction we move, the rate of progress tends to accelerate itself. And this is pre-eminently the case when the motion is downwards. Every day that a bad man lives he is a worse man. My friend! you are on a sloping descent. Imperceptibly—because you will not look at the landmarks—but really, and not so very slowly either; convictions are dying out, impulses to good are becoming feeble, habits of neglect of conscience are becoming fixed, special forms of sin—avarice, or pride, or lust—are striking their claws deeper into your soul, and holding their bleeding booty firmer. In all regions of life exercise strengthens capacity. The wrestler,

according to the old Greek parable, who began by carrying a calf on his shoulders, got to carry an ox by and by.

It is a solemn thought this of the steady continuous aggravation of sin in the individual character. Surely nothing can be small which goes to make up that rapidly growing total. Beware of the little beginnings which "eat as doth a canker." Beware of the slightest deflection from the straight line of right. If there be two lines, one straight and the other going off at the sharpest angle, you have only to produce both far enough, and there will be room between them for all the space that separates hell from heaven! Beware of lading your souls with the weight of small single sins. We heap upon ourselves, by slow, steady accretion through a lifetime, the weight that, though it is gathered by grains, crushes the soul. There is nothing heavier than sand. You may lift it by particles. It drifts in atoms, but heaped upon a man it will break his bones, and blown over the land it buries pyramid and sphynx, the temples of gods and the homes of men beneath its barren solid waves. The leprosy gnaws the flesh off a man's bones, and joints and limbs drop off—he is a living death. So with every soul that is under the dominion of these lying desires—it is slowly rotting away piecemeal, "waxing corrupt according to the lusts of deceit."

II. Note how, this being so, we have here *the hopeless command to put off the old man.*

That command "put it off" is the plain dictate of conscience and of common sense. But it seems as hopeless

as it is imperative. I suppose everybody feels sometimes, more or less distinctly, that they ought to make an effort and get rid of these beggarly usurpers that tyrannize over will, and conscience, and life. Attempts enough are made to shake off the yoke. We have all tried some time or other. Our days are full of foiled resolutions, attempts that have broken down, unsuccessful rebellions, ending like the struggles of some snared wild creature, in wrapping the meshes tighter round us. How many times, since you were a boy or a girl, have you said—"Now I am *determined* that I will never do that again. I have flung away opportunities. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly—but I now turn over a new leaf!" Yes, and you have turned it—and, if I might go on with the metaphor, the first gust of passion or temptation has blown the leaf back again, and the old page has been spread before you once more just as it used to be. The history of individual souls and the tragedy of the world's history recurring in every age, in which the noblest beginnings lead to disastrous ends, and each new star of promise that rises on the horizon leads men into quagmires and sets in blood, sufficiently show how futile the attempt in our own strength to overcome and expel the evils that are rooted in our nature.

Moralists may preach, "Unless above himself he can erect himself, how mean a thing is man;" but all the preaching in the world is of no avail. The task is an impossibility. The stream cannot rise above its source, nor be purified in its flow if bitter waters come from the fountain. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an

unclean?" There is no power in human nature to cast off this clinging self. As in the awful vision of the poet, the serpent is grown into the man. The will is feeble for good, the conscience sits like a discrowned king issuing empty mandates, while all his realm is up in rebellion, and treats his proclamations as so much waste paper. How can a man re-make himself? how cast off his own nature? The means at his disposal themselves need to be cleansed, for themselves are tainted. It is the old story—who will keep the keepers?—who will heal the sick physicians? You will sometimes see a wounded animal licking its wounds with its own tongue. How much more hopeless still is our effort by our own power to staunch and heal the gashes which sin has made! "Put off the old man"—yes—and if it but clung to the limbs like the hero's poisoned vest, it might be possible. But it is not a case of throwing aside clothing, it is stripping off self of the very skin and flesh—and if there is nothing more to be said than such vain commonplaces of impossible duty, then we must needs abandon hope, and wear the rotting evil till we die.

But that is not all. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son did—He condemned sin in the flesh." So we come to

III. *The Possibility of fulfilling the Command.*

The context tells us how this is possible. The law, the pattern, and the power for complete victory over the old sinful self, are to be found, "as the truth is—in Jesus." Union with Christ gives us a real possession of a new

principle of life, derived from Him, and like His own. That real, perfect, immortal life, which hath no kindred with evil, and flings off pollution and decay from its pure surface, will wrestle with and finally overcome the living death of obedience to the deceitful lusts. Our weakness will be made vigorous by His inbreathed power. Our gravitation to earth and sin will be overcome by the yearning of that life to its source. An all constraining motive will be found in love to Him who has given Himself for us. A new hope will spring as to what may be possible for us when we see Jesus, and in Him recognize the true Man, whose image we may bear. We shall die with Him to sin, when, resting by faith on Him who has died for sin, we are made comformable to His death, that we may walk in newness of life. Faith in Jesus gives us a share in the working of that mighty power by which He makes all things new. The renovation blots out the past, and changes the direction of the future. The fountain in our hearts sends forth bitter waters that cannot be healed. "And the Lord showed him a tree," even that cross whereon Christ was crucified for us, "which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet."

I remember a rough parable of Luther's, grafted on an older legend, on this matter, which runs somewhat in this fashion:—A man's heart is like a foul stable. Wheelbarrows and shovels are of little use, except to remove some of the surface filth, and to litter all the passages in the process. What is to be done with it? "Turn the Elbe into it," says he. The flood will sweep away all the pollution. Not my own efforts, but the influx

of that pardoning, cleansing grace which are in Christ will wash away the accumulations of years, and the ingrained evil which has stained every part of my being. We cannot cleanse ourselves, we cannot "put off" this old nature which has struck its roots so deep into our being; but if we turn to Him with faith and say—Forgive me, and cleanse, and strip from me the foul and ragged robe fit only for the swine-troughs in the far-off land of disobedience, He will receive us and answer all our desires, and cast around us the pure garment of His own righteousness. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death."

SERMON IX.

THE NEW MAN.

EPHESIANS iv, 24.

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

WE had occasion to remark in a former sermon, that Paul regards this and the preceding clauses as the summing up of "the truth in Jesus"; or, in other words, he considers the radical transformation and renovation of the whole moral nature as being the purpose of the revelation of God in Christ. To this end they have "heard Him." To this end they have "learned Him." To this end they have been "taught in Him," receiving, by union with Him, all the various processes of His patient discipline. This is the inmost meaning of all the lessons in that great school in which all Christians are scholars, and Christ is the teacher and the theme, and union to Him the condition of entrance, and the manifold workings of His providence and His grace the instruments of training—and heaven the home when school time is over—that we should become new men in Christ Jesus.

This great practical issue is set forth here under three

aspects—one negative, two positive. The negative process is single and simple—"put off the old man." The positive is double—a spiritual "renewal" effected in our spirits, in the deep centre of our personal being, by that Divine Spirit who, dwelling in us, is "the Spirit of our minds"; and then, consequent upon that inward renewal, a renovation of life and character, which is described as being the "putting on," as if it were a garment, of "the new man," created by a Divine act, and consisting in moral and spiritual likeness to God. It is not necessary to deal, except incidentally, with the two former, but I desire to consider the last of these—the putting on of the new man—a little more closely, and to try to bring out the wealth and depth of the Apostle's words in this wonderful text.

The ideas contained seem to me in brief to be these—the great purpose of the Gospel is our moral renewal; that moral renewal is a creation after God's image; that new creation has to be put on or appropriated by us; the great means of appropriating it is contact with God's truth. Let us consider these points in order.

I. *The great purpose of the Gospel is our moral Renewal*; "the new man . . . created in righteousness and . . . holiness."

Now, of course, there are other ways of putting the end of the Gospel. This is by no means an exhaustive setting forth of its purpose. We may say that Christ has come in order that men may know God. We may say that He comes in order that the Divine love, which ever delights to communicate, may bestow itself, and may conceive of

the whole majestic series of acts of self-revelation from the beginning as being—if I may so say—for the gratification of that impulse to impart itself, which is the characteristic of love in God and man. We may say that the purpose of the whole is the deliverance of men from the burden and guilt of sin. But whether we speak of the end of the Gospel as the glory of God, or the blessedness of man, or as here, as being the moral perfection of the individual or of the race, they are all but various phrases of the one complete truth. The Gospel is the consequence and the manifestation of the love of God, which delights to be known and possessed by loving souls, and being known changes them into its own likeness, which to know is to be happy, which to resemble is to be pure.

The first thing that strikes me about this representation of our text is the *profound sense of human sinfulness* which underlies it.

The language is utterly unmeaning—or at all events grossly exaggerated—unless all have sinned, and the nature which belongs to men universally, apart from the transforming power of Christ's spirit, be corrupt and evil. And that it is so is the constant view of Scripture. The Bible notion of what men need in order to be pure and good is very different from the superficial notions of worldly moralists and philanthropists. We hear a great deal about "culture," as if all that were needed were the training and strengthening of the nature, as if what was mainly needed was the development of the understanding. We hear about "reformation" from some who look rather deeper than the superficial apostles of culture.

And how singularly the very word proclaims the insufficiency of the remedy which it suggests! "Re-formation" affects form and not substance. It puts the old materials into a new shape. Exactly so—and much good may be expected from that! They are the old materials still, and it matters comparatively little how they are arranged. It is not re-formation, but re-novation, or, to go deeper still, re-generation, that the world needs; not new forms, but a new life; not the culture and development of what it has in itself, but extirpation of the old by the infusion of something new and pure that has no taint of corruption, nor any contact with evil. "Verily, I say unto you, ye must be born again."

All slighter notions of the need and more superficial diagnosis of the disease lead to a treatment with palliatives which never touch the true seat of the mischief. The poison flowers may be plucked, but the roots live on. It is useless to build dykes to keep out the wild waters. Somewhere or other they will find a way through. The only real cure is that which only the Creating hand can effect, who, by slow operation of some inward agency, can raise the level of the low lands, and lift them above the threatening waves. What is needed is a radical transformation, going down to the very roots of the being; and that necessity is clearly implied in the language of this text, which declares that a nature possessing righteousness and holiness is "a new man" to be "put on" as from without, not to be evolved as from within.

It is to be further noticed *what the Apostle specifies as*

the elements, or characteristics *of this new nature*—righteousness and holiness.

The proclamation of a new nature in Christ Jesus, great and precious truth as it is, has often been connected with teaching which has been mystical in the bad sense of that word, and has been made the stalking horse of practical immorality. But here we have it distinctly defined in what that new nature consists. There is no vague mystery about it, no tampering with the idea of personality. The people who put on the new man are the same people after as before. The newness consists in moral and spiritual characteristics. And these are all summed up in the two—righteousness and holiness. To which is added in the substantially parallel passage in Colossians, "Renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," where, I suppose, we must regard the "knowledge" as meaning that personal knowledge and acquaintance which has its condition in love, and is the foundation of the more purely moral qualities of which our text speaks.

Is there, then, any distinction between these two? I think there is very obviously so. "Righteousness" is, I suppose, to be understood here in its narrower meaning of observance of what is right, the squaring of conduct according to a solemn sovereign law of duty. Substantially it is equivalent to the somewhat heathenish word "morality," and refers human conduct and character to a law or standard. What, then, is "holiness"? It is the same general conduct and character, considered, however, under another aspect,

and in another relation. It involves the reference of life and self to God, consecration to, and service of Him. It is not a mere equivalent of purity, but distinctly carries the higher reference. The obedience now is not to a law but to a Lord. The perfection now does not consist in conformity to an ideal standard, but in likeness and devotion to God. That which I ought to do is that which my Father in heaven wills. Or, if the one word may roughly represent the more secular word "morality," the other may roughly represent the less devout phrase, "practical religion."

These are "new," as actually realized in human nature. Paul thinks that we shall not possess them except as a consequence of renovation. But they are not "new" in the sense that the contents of Christian morality are different from the contents of the law written on men's hearts. The Gospel proclaims and produces no fantastic ethics of its own. The actions which it stamps in its mint are those which pass current in all lands—not a provincial coinage, but recognized as true in ring, and of full weight everywhere. Do not fancy that Christian righteousness is different from ordinary "goodness," except as being broader and deeper, more thorough going, more imperative. Divergencies there are, for our law is more than a republication of the law written on men's hearts. Though the one agrees with the other, yet the area which they cover is not the same. The precepts of the one, like some rock-hewn inscriptions by forgotten kings, are weathered and indistinct, often illegible, often misread, often neglected. The other is written in living

characters in a perfect life. It includes all that the former attempts to enjoin, and much more besides. It alters the perspective, so to speak, of heathen morals, and brings into prominence graces overlooked or despised by them. It breathes a deeper meaning and a tenderer beauty into the words which express human conceptions of virtue, but it does take up these into itself. And instead of setting up a "righteousness" which is peculiar to itself, and has nothing to do with the world's morality, Christianity says, as Christ has taught us, "Except your righteousness *exceed* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." The same apostle who here declares that actual righteousness and holiness are new things on the earth, allows full force to whatsoever weight may be in the heathen notion of "virtue," and adopts the words and ideas which he found ready made to his hands, in that notion—as fitly describing the Christian graces which he enjoined. Grecian moralists supplied him with the names true, honest, just, and pure. His "righteousness" accepted these as included within its scope. And we have to remember that we are not invested with that new nature, unless we are living in the exercise of these common and familiar graces which the consciences and hearts of all the world recognize for "lovely" and "of good report," hail as "virtue," and crown with "praise."

So, then, let me pause here for a moment to urge you to take these thoughts as a very sharp and salutary test. You call yourselves Christian people. The purpose of your Christianity is your growth and perfecting in simple

purity, and devotion to, and dependence on, our loving Father. Our religion is nothing unless it leads to these. Otherwise it is like a plant that never seeds, but may bear some feeble blossoms that drop shrunken to the ground before they mature. To very many of us the old solemn remonstrance should come with awakening force—"Ye did run well, what did hinder you?" You have apprehended Christ as the revealer and bringer of the great mercy of God, and have so been led in some measure to put your confidence in Him for your salvation and deliverance. But have you apprehended Him as the mould into which your life is to be poured, that life having been made fluent and plastic by the warmth of His love? You have apprehended Him as your refuge; have you apprehended Him as your inward sanctity? You have gone to Him as the source of salvation from the guilt and penalties of sin; have you gone to Him, and are you daily growing in the conscious possession of Him, as the means of salvation from the corruption and evil of sin? He comes to make us good. What has He made you? Anything different from what you were twenty years ago? Then, if not, and in so far as you are unchanged and unbettered, the Gospel is a failure for you, and you are untrue to it. The great purpose of all the work of Christ—His life, His sorrows, His passion, His resurrection, His glory, His continuous operation by the Spirit and the Word—is to make new men who shall be just and devout, righteous and holy.

II. A second principle contained in these words, is that *this moral Renewal is a Creation in the image of God.*

The new man is "created after the image of God"—that is, of course, according to or in the likeness of God. There is evident reference here to the account of man's creation in Genesis, and the idea is involved that this new man is the restoration and completion of that earlier likeness, which, in some sense, has faded out of the features and form of our sinful souls. It is to be remembered, however, that there is an image of God inseparable from human nature, and not effaceable by any obscuring or disturbance caused by sin. Man's likeness to God consists in his being a person, possessed of a will and self-consciousness. And that mysterious gift of personality abides whatever perishes. But beyond that natural image of God, as we may call it, there is something else which fades wholly with the first breath of evil, like the reflexion of the sky on some windless sea. The natural likeness remains, and without it no comparison would be possible. We should not think of saying that a stone or an eagle were unlike God. But while the personal being makes comparison fitting, what makes the true contrast? In what respect is man unlike God? In moral antagonism. What is the true likeness? Moral harmony. What separates men from their Father in heaven? Is it that His "years are throughout all generations," and "my days are as an handbreadth"? Is it that His power is infinite, and mine all thwarted by other might and ever tending to weakness and extinction? Is it that His wisdom, sunlike, waxes not nor wanes, and there is nothing hid from its beams, while my knowledge, like the lesser light, shines by reflected

radiance, serves but to make the night visible and as crescent and decaying, changeful and wandering? No. All such distinctions based upon what people call the sovereign attributes of God—the distinctions of creator and created, infinite and finite, omnipotent and weak, eternal and transient—make no real gulf between God and man. If we have only to say, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are" his "ways higher than" our "ways," that difference is not unlikeness, and establishes no separation; for low and flat though the dull earth be, does not heaven bend down round it, and send rain and sun, dew and blessing? But it is because "your ways are not *as* my ways"—because there is actual opposition, because the *directions* are different—that there is unlikeness. The image of God lies not only in that personality which the "Father of Lies" too possesses, but in "righteousness and holiness."

But besides this reference to the original creation of man, there is another reason for the representation of the new nature as being a work of Divine creative power. It is in order to give the most emphatic expression possible to the truth that we do not make our righteousness for ourselves, but receive it as from Him. The new man is not our work, it is God's creation. As at the beginning, the first human life is represented as not originated in the line of natural cause and effect, but as a new and supernatural commencement, so in every Christian soul the life which is derived from God, and will unfold itself in His likeness, comes from His own breath inbreathed into the nostrils. It too is out of the line of natural causes. It

too is a direct gift from God. It too is a true supernatural being—a real and new creation.

May I venture a step further? "The new man" is spoken of here as if it had existence ere we "put it on." I do not press that, as if it necessarily involved the idea which I am going to suggest, for the peculiar form of expression is probably only due to the exigencies of the metaphor. Still it may not be altogether foreign to the whole scope of the passage, if I remind you that the new man, the true likeness of God, has, indeed, a real existence apart from our assumption of it. Of course, the righteousness and holiness which make that new nature in me have no being till they become mine. But we believe that the righteousness and holiness which we make ours come from another, who bestows them on us. "The new man" is not a mere ideal, but has a historical and a present existence. The ideal has lived and lives, is a human person, even Jesus Christ the express image of the Father, who is the beginning of the new creation, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness. That fair vision of a humanity detached from all consequences of sin, renewed in perfect beauty, stainless and Godlike, is no unsubstantial dream, but a simple fact. He ever liveth. His word to us is "I counsel thee to buy of me—white raiment." And a full parallel to the words of our text, which bid us "put on the new man, created after God in righteousness and holiness," is found in the other words of the same apostle—"Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

In accordance with this—

III. It is further to be noticed that *this new creation has to be put on and appropriated by us.*

The same idea which, as I have already remarked, is conveyed by the image of a new creation, is reiterated in this metaphor of putting on the new nature, as if it were a garment. Our task is not to weave it, but to wear it. It is made and ready.

And that process of assumption or putting on has two parts. We are clothed upon with Christ in a double way, or rather in a double sense. We are "found in him not having our own righteousness," but invested with His for our pardon and acceptance. We are clothed with His righteousness for our purifying and sanctifying.

Both are the conditions of our being like God. Both are the gifts of God. The one, however, is an act; the other a process. Both are received. The one is received on condition of simple faith; the other is received by the medium of faithful effort. Both are included in the wide conception of salvation, but the law for the one is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us;" and the law for the other is—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Both come from Christ. But for the one we have the invitation, "Buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed;" and for the other we have the command, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh." There is the assumption of His righteousness which makes a man a Christian, and has for its condition simple faith. There is the assumption of His righteous-

ness sanctifying and transforming us which follows in a Christian course, as its indispensable accompaniment and characteristic, and that is realized by daily and continuous effort.

And one word about the manner, the effort as set forth here. Twofold, as I have already pointed out—a negative and positive. We are not concerned here with the relations of these amongst themselves, but I may remark that there is no growth in holiness possible without the constant accompanying process of excision and crucifixion of the old. If you want to grow purer and liker Christ, you must slay yourselves. You cannot gird on "righteousness" above the old self, as some beggar might buckle to himself royal velvet with its ermine over his filthy tatters. There must be a putting off in order to and accompanying the putting on. Strip yourselves of yourselves, and then you "shall not be found naked," but clothed with the garments of salvation, as the bride with the robe which is the token of the bridegroom's love and the pledge of her espousals to him.

And let nobody wonder that the Apostle here commands us, as by our own efforts, to put on and make ours what is in many other places of Scripture treated as God's gift. These earnest exhortations are perfectly consistent with the belief that all comes from God. Our faithful adherence to our Lord and Master, our honest efforts in His strength to secure more and more of His likeness, determine the extent to which we shall possess that likeness. The new nature is God's gift, and it is given to us according to His own fulness indeed, but also according

to the measure of our faith. Blessed be His name! we have nothing to do but to accept His gift. The garment with which He clothes our nakedness and hides our filth is woven in no earthly looms. As with the first sinful pair, so with all their children since, "the Lord God made them" the covering which they cannot make for themselves. But we have to accept it, and we have by daily toil, all our lives long, to gather it more and more closely around us, to wrap ourselves more and more completely in its ample folds. We have by effort and longing, by self-abnegation and aspiration, by prayer and work, by communion and service, to increase our possession of that likeness to God which lives in Jesus Christ, and from Him is stamped ever more and more deeply on the heart. For the strengthening of our confidence and our gratitude, we have to remember with lowly trust that it is true of us, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." For the quickening of our energy and faithful efforts we have to give heed to the command, and fulfil it in ourselves—"Be ye renewed in the Spirit of your minds, and put on the new man."

IV. And, finally, the text contains the principle that *the means of appropriating this new nature is contact with the truth.*

If you will look at the margins of some Bibles, you will see that our translators have placed there a rendering, which, as is not unfrequently the case, is decidedly better than that adopted by them in the text. Instead of "true holiness," the literal rendering is "holiness of truth"—and the apostle's purpose in the expression is not to

particularize the quality, but the *origin* of the "holiness." It is "of truth," that is, "produced by" the holiness which flows from the truth as it is in Jesus, of which he has been speaking a moment before.

And we come, therefore, to this practical conclusion, that whilst the agent of renovation is the Divine Spirit, and the condition of renovation is our cleaving to Christ, the medium of renovation and the weapon which the transforming grace employs is "the word of the truth of the gospel," whereby we are sanctified. There we get the law, and there we get the motive and the impulse. There we get the encouragement and the hope. In it, in the grand simple message—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," lie the germs of all moral progress. And in proportion as we believe that—not with the cold belief of our understandings, but with the living affiance of our hearts and our whole spiritual being—in proportion as we believe them, in that proportion shall we grow in "knowledge," shall grow in "righteousness," in the "image of Him that created us." The Gospel is the great means of this change, because it is the great means by which He who works the change comes near to our understandings and our hearts.

So let us learn how impossible are righteousness and holiness, morality and religion in men unless they flow from this source. It is the truth that sanctifies. It is the Spirit who wields that truth that sanctifies. It is Christ who sends the Spirit who sanctifies. But, brethren, beyond the range of this light is only darkness, and that

nature which is not cleansed by His priestly hand laid upon it remains leprous, and he who is clothed with any other garment than His righteousness will find "the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." And let us learn, on the other hand, the incompleteness and monstrosity of a professed belief in "the truth" which does not produce this righteousness and holiness. It may be real—God forbid that we should step into His place and assume His office of discerning the thoughts of the heart, and the genuineness of Christian professions! But, at any rate, it is no exaggeration nor presumption to say that a professed faith which is not making us daily better, gentler, simpler, purer, more truthful, more tender, more brave, more self-oblivious, more loving, more strong—more like Christ—is wofully deficient either in reality or in power—is, if genuine, ready to perish—if lit at all, smouldering to extinction. Christian men and women! is "the truth" moulding you into Christ's likeness? If not, see to it whether it be the *truth* which you are holding, and whether you are *holding* the truth or have unconsciously let it pass from a grasp numbed by the freezing coldness of the world.

And for us all, let us see that we lay to heart the large truths of this text, and give them that personal bearing without which they are of no avail. *I* need renovation in my inmost nature. Nothing can renew *my* soul but the power of Christ, who is *my* life. *I* am naked and foul. Nothing can cleanse and clothe but He. The blessed truth which reveals Him calls for *my* individual faith. And if *I* put *my* confidence in that Lord, He will

dwell in *my* inmost spirit, and so sway *my* affections and mould *my* will that *I* shall be transformed into His perfect likeness. He begins with each of us, by bringing the best robe to cast over the rags of the returning prodigals. He ends not with any who trust Him, until they stand amid the hosts of the heavens who follow Him, clothed with fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of His Holy Ones.

SERMON X.

THE HIDING PLACE.

ISAIAH xxxii, 2.

And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

WE may well say, Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Here are distinctly attributed to one of ourselves, if we take the words in their simplicity and fulness, functions and powers which universal experience has taught us not to look for in humanity. And there have been a great many attempts—as it seems to me, altogether futile and baseless ones—to break the force of these words as a distinct prophecy of Jesus Christ. Surely the language is far too wide to have application to any real or ideal Jewish monarch, except one whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom! Surely the experience of a hundred centuries might teach men that there is *one* man, and one alone, who is the refuge from all dangers, the fruition of all desires, the rest and refreshment in all trials!

And I, for my part, have no hesitation in saying that

the only reference of these words which gives full weight to their wealth of blessing, is to regard them as a prophecy of *the* man—Christ Jesus; hiding in whom we are safe, "coming" to whom we "never thirst," guarded and blest by whom no weariness can befall us, and dwelling in whom this weary world shall be full of refreshment and peace!

I do not need to point out the exquisite beauty of the imagery or the pathos and peace that breathe in the majestic rhythm of the words. There is something more than poetical beauty or rhetorical amplification of a single thought in those three clauses. The "hiding place" and "covert" refer to one class of wants; the "river of water in a dry place" to yet another; and "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" to yet a third. And, though they be tinged and dyed in Eastern imagery, the realities of life in Western lands, and in all ages, give them a deeper beauty than that of lovely imagery, and are the best keys to understanding their meaning. We shall, perhaps, best grasp the whole depth of that meaning according to the reference which I venture to give to the text, if we consider the sad and solemn conception of man's life that underlies it; the enigmatical and obstinate hope which it holds out in the teeth of all experience—"A man shall be a refuge;" and the solution of the riddle in the man Christ Jesus!

I. First, there underlies this prophecy a *very sad*, a *very true conception of human life.*

The three classes of promises have correlative with them three phases of man's condition, three diverse aspects of his need and misery. The "covert" and the

"hiding place" imply tempest and storm and danger; the "river of water" implies drought and thirst; "the shadow of a great rock" implies lassitude and languor, fatigue and weariness. The view of life that arises from the combination of all three bears upon its front the signature of truth in the very fact that it is a sad view.

For, I suppose, notwithstanding all that we may say concerning the beauty and the blessedness scattered broadcast round about us; notwithstanding that we believe, and hold as for our lives the "happy faith that all which we behold is full of blessing," it needs but a very short experience of this life, and but a superficial examination of our own histories and our own hearts, in order to come to the conclusion that the world is full of strange and terrible sadness, that every life has dark tracts and long stretches of sombre tint, and that no representation is true to fact which dips its pencil only in light and flings no shadows on the canvas. There is no depth in a Chinese picture, because there is no shade. It is the wrinkles and marks of tear and wear that make the expression in a *man's* portrait. "Life's sternest painter is the best." The gloomy thoughts which are charged against Scripture are the true thoughts about man, and the world as man has made it. Not, indeed, that life needs to be so, but that by reason of our own evil and departure from God there have come in as a disturbing element the retributive consequences of our own godlessness, and these have made danger where else were safety, thirst where else were rivers of water, and weariness and lassitude where else were strength and bounding hope.

So then, look for a moment at these three points that come out of my text, in order to lay the foundation for subsequent considerations.

We live a life defenceless and exposed to many a storm and tempest. I need but remind you of the adverse circumstances—the wild winds that go sweeping across the flat level, the biting blasts that come down from the snow-clad mountains of destiny that lie round the low plain upon which we live. I need but remind you of the dangers that are lodged for our spiritual life in the temptations to evil that are round about us. I need but remind you of that creeping and clinging consciousness of being exposed to a Divinely commissioned retribution and punishment which perverts the Name that ought to be the basis of all our blessedness, into a Name unwelcome and terrible because threatening judgment. I need but remind you how men's sins have made it needful that when the mighty God, even the Lord, appears before them, "it shall be very tempestuous round about him." Men fear and ought to fear "the blast of the breath of his nostrils," which must burn up all that is evil. And I need but remind you of that last wild wind of Death that whirls the sin-faded leaves into dark corners where they lie and rot.

My brother! You have not lived thus long without learning how defenceless you are against the storm of adverse circumstances. You have not lived thus long without learning that though, blessed be God! there do come in all our lives long periods of halcyon rest, when "birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave," and the heavens above are clear as sapphire, and the sea

around is transparent as opal—yet the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, may rise on the horizon, and may thicken and blacken and grow greater and nearer till all the sky is dark, and burst in lightning and rain and fierceness of wind, till "through the torn sail the wild tempest is streaming," and the white crests of the waves are like the mane of Death's pale horse leaping upon the broken ship. We have all learnt in how profound a sense, by reason of outward adverse circumstances and inward temptations, by reason of the fears of a justice which we know is throned at the centre of the creation, by reason of a death which to us is a terror, and by reason of that universal fear of "after death the judgment," storm and tempest stoop upon our paths. God made the sunshine, and we have made it a storm. God made life blessed and full of safety and peace, and we have wrenched ourselves from Him and stand defenceless amidst its dangers.

Then, there is another aspect and conception of life which underlies these words of my text. The image of the desert was before the prophet's rapt vision. He saw the sand whirled into mad dancing columns before the blast which swept across the unsheltered flat, with nothing, for a day's march, to check its force. But the wilderness is not only shelterless, it is waterless too—a place in which wild and ravening thirst finds no refreshing draughts, and the tongue cleaves to the blackening gums.

"Rivers of water in a dry place!" And what is the prose fact of that? That you and I live in the midst of a world which has no correspondence with nor capacity

of satisfying our truest and deepest selves—that we bear about with us a whole set of longings and needs and weaknesses and strengths and capacities, all of which, like the climbing tendrils of some creeping plant, go feeling and putting out their green fingers to lay hold of some prop and stay!—that man is so made that for his rest and blessedness he needs an external object round which his spirit may cling, on which his desires may fall and rest, by which his heart may be clasped, which shall be authority for his will, peace for his fears, sprinkling and cleansing for his conscience, light for his understanding, shall be in complete correspondence with his inward nature,—the water for his thirst, and the bread for his hunger.

And as thus, on the very nature which each of us carries, there is stamped the signature of dependence and the necessity of finding an external object on which to rest it; and as, further, men will not be tutored even by their own miseries or by the voice of their own wants, and ever confound their wishes with their wants and their whims with their needs, therefore it comes to pass that the appetite which was only meant to direct us to God, and to be as a wholesome hunger in order to secure our partaking with relish and delight of the Divine food that is provided for it, becomes unsatisfied, a torture, and unslaked, a ravening madness; and men's needs become men's misery; and men's hunger becomes men's famine; and men's thirst becomes men's death! A dry land wherein no water is.

All about us there are these creatures of God, bright and blessed and beautiful, fit for their functions and

meant to minister to our gladness. They are meant to be held in subordination. It is not meant that we should find in them the food for our souls. Wealth and honour and wisdom and love and gratified ambition and successful purpose, and whatsoever other good things a man may gather about him and achieve—he may have them all, and yet beyond them all there shall be a great aching, longing vacuity in his soul. His true and inmost being will be groping through the darkness like a plant growing in a cellar, for the light which alone can tinge its pale petals and swell its shrivelling blossoms to ripeness and fruit.

A dry place, as well as a dangerous place. Have not you found it so? I believe every soul of man has, if he will be honest with himself, and there is not one among us to-night who would not, if they were to look into the deepest facts and real governing experience of their lives, confess—I thirst—"my soul thirsteth." And, O brethren, why not go on with the quotation, and make that which is else a pain, a condition of blessedness? Why not recognize the meaning of all this restless disquiet, and say "my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God?"

And then there is the other idea underlying these words also, yet another phase of this sad life of ours—not only danger and drought, but also *weariness* and languor. The desert stretches before us again, where there is no shelter from the blast and no trickling stream amid the yellowing sand; where the fierce ball above beats down cruelly and its hot rays are flung up cruelly into our faces, and the glare blinds us, and the stifling heat wearies us, and work is a torture and motion is misery,

and we long for nothing so much as to be quiet and to hide our heads in some shade.

I was reading, a day or two ago, one of our last books of travels in the wilderness of the Exodus, in which the writer told how, after toiling for hours under a scorching sun, over the hot white marly flat, seeing nothing but a beetle or two on the way, and finding no shelter anywhere from the pitiless beating of the sunshine, the three travellers came at last to a little Retem bush only a few feet high, and flung themselves down and tried to hide, at least, their heads, from those "sunbeams like swords," even beneath its ragged shade. And my text tells of a great rock, with blue dimness in its shadow, with haply a fern or two in the moist places of its crevices, where there is rest and a man can lie down and be cool, while all outside is burning sun, and burning sand, and dancing mirage.

Oh! the weariness felt by us all, of plod, plod, plodding across the sand! That fatal monotony into which every man's life stiffens, as far as outward circumstances, outward joys and pleasures go! the depressing influence of custom which takes the edge off all gladness and adds a burden to every duty! the weariness of all that tugging up the hill, of all that collar-work which we have to do! Who is there that has not his moods—and that by no means the least worthy and man-like of his moods—wherein he feels—not, perhaps, all is vanity, but "how infinitely weary all is."

And so every race of man that ever has lived has managed out of two miseries to make a kind of shadowy gladness; and, knowing the weariness of life and the

blackness of death, has somewhat softened the latter by throwing upon it the contrast of the former, and has said, "Well, at any rate, if the grave be narrow and dark, and outside the warm precincts of the cheerful day there be that ambiguous night, at least it is the time for sleep; and, if we cannot be sure of anything more, we shall rest then, at any rate." So the hope of "long disquiet merged in rest" becomes almost bright, and man's weariness finds most pathetic expression in his thinking of the grave as a bed where he can stretch himself and be still. Life is hard, life is dry, life is dangerous.

II. But another thought suggested by these words is—*The Mysterious Hope which shines through them*, that one of ourselves shall deliver us from all this evil in life.

"*A man* shall be a refuge, rivers of water, the shadow of a great rock."

Such an expectation seems to be right in the teeth of all experience, and far too high-pitched ever to be fulfilled. It appears to demand in him who should bring it to pass powers which are more than human, and which must in some inexplicable way be wide as the range of humanity and enduring as the succession of the ages.

It is worth while to realize to ourselves these two points which seem to make such words as these of our text a blank impossibility. Experience contradicts them, and common sense demands for their fulfilment an apparently impossible human character.

All experience seems to teach—does it not?—that no human arm or heart can be to another soul what these words promise, and what we need. And yet the men

who have been disappointed and disenchanted a thousand times do still look among their fellows for what their fellows, too, are looking for, and none have ever found. Have *we* found what we seek among men? Have we ever known amongst the dearest that we have clung to, one arm that was strong enough to keep us in all danger? Has there ever been a human love to which we can run with the security that *there* is a strong tower where no evil can touch us? There have been many delights in all our lives mediated and ministered to us by those that we loved. They have taught us, and helped us, and strengthened us in a thousand ways. We have received from them draughts of wisdom, of love, of joy, of guidance, of impulse, of comfort, which have been, as water in the desert is, more precious than gold. Our fellow-travellers have shared their store with us, "letting down their pitchers upon their hand," and giving us drink; but has the draught ever slaked the thirst? They but carry a pitcher, and a pitcher is not a fountain. Have there been any in all the round of those that we have loved and trusted, to whom we have trusted absolutely, without having been disappointed? They, like us, are hemmed in by human limitations. They each bear a burdened and thirsty spirit, itself needing such supplies. And to the truest, happiest, most soul-sufficing companionship there comes at last that dread hour which ends all sweet commerce of giving and receiving, and makes the rest of life, for some of us, one monotonous ashen-gray wilderness, where no water is. These things make it impossible for us to find anywhere amongst men our refuge and our fruition.

And yet how strange, how pathetic, is the fact that after all disappointments, men still obstinately continue to look among their fellows for guidance, and for light, for consolation, for defence, and for strength! After a thousand failures they still hope. Does not the search at once confess that hitherto they have not found, else why be seeking still?—and that they yet believe they shall find, else why not cease the vain quest? And surely He who made us, made us not in vain, nor cursed us with immortal hopes which are only persistent lies. Surely there is some living person who will vindicate these unquenchable hopes of humanity, and receive and requite our love and trust, and satisfy our longings, and explain the riddle of our lives. If there be not, nor ever has been, nor ever can be a man who shall satisfy us with his love, and defend us with his power, and be our all sufficient satisfaction and our rest in weariness, then much of man's noblest nature is a mistake, and many of his purest and profoundest hopes are an illusion, a mockery, and a snare. The obstinate hope that, within the limits of humanity, we shall find what we need is a mystery, except on one hypothesis, that it, too, belongs to "the unconscious prophecies" that God has lodged in all men's hearts.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, how such functions as those of which my text speaks not only seem to be contradicted by all experience, but manifestly and obviously to transcend the possibilities of human nature. *A man* to defend me; and he himself—does *he* need no defence? A man to supply my wants; and is his spirit, then, other than mine that it can become the all sufficient fulness for

my emptiness? He that can do this for one spirit must be greater than the spirit for which he doeth it. He that can do it for the whole race of man, through all ages, in all circumstances, down to the end of time, in every latitude, under every condition of civilisation, who must he be who, for the whole world, evermore and always is their defence, their gladness, their shelter, and their rest? The function requires a divine power, and the application of the power requires a human hand. It is not enough that I should be pointed to a far-off heaven, where there dwells an infinite loving God—I believe that we need more than that. We need not merely "God is my refuge and my strength," but "a man shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest."

III. And so that brings me to the last point to be noticed, namely :— *The solution of the mystery in the person of Jesus Christ.*

That which seemed impossible is real. The forebodings of experience have not fathomed the powers of Divine Love. There *is* a man, our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, who can be to single souls the adequate object of their perfect trust, the abiding home of their deepest love, the unfailing supply for their profoundest wants. There *is* one man, whom it is wise and blessed to look to as the exclusive source of all our peace, the absolute Ruler of all our lives. There *is* a man in whom we find all that we have vainly sought in men. There *is* a man, who can be to all ages and to the whole race their refuge, their satisfaction, their rest. "It behoved him to be made in all points like unto his brethren,"

that His succour might be ever near, and His sympathy sure. The man Christ Jesus who, being man, is God manifest in the flesh, exercises in one and the same act the offices of Divine pity and human compassion, of Divine and human guardianship, of Divine and human love.

> "And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought."

The dreams of weary hearts that have longed for an impossible perfection are all below the reality. The fact surpasses all expectation. It is more than all prophecies, it is more than all hopes, it is more than all praise. It is God's unspeakable gift. Well might an angel voice proclaim the mystery of love, "Unto you is *born* a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The ancient promise of our text is a history now. A man has been and is all these things for us.

A refuge and a hiding place from every storm! Adverse circumstances sweep upon us, and His mighty hand is put down there as a buckler, behind which we may hide and be safe. Temptations to evil storm upon us, and enclosed within Him they never touch us. The fears of our own hearts swirl like a river in flood against the walls of our fortress home, and we can laugh at them, for it is founded upon a rock! The day of judgment rises before us solemn and certain, and we can await it without fear, and approach it with calm joy. I call upon no mountains and hills to cover me.

> "Rock of ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee?"

"Rivers of water in a dry place." Hungry and thirsty, my soul faints within me. I longed for light and behold darkness. I longed for help and there was none that could come close to my spirit to succour and to give me drink in the desert. My conscience cried in all its wounds for cleansing and staunching, and no Comforter nor any balm was there. My heart, weary of limited loves and mortal affections, howsoever sweet and precious, yearned and bled for one to rest upon, all-sufficient and eternal. I thirsted with a thirst that was more than desire, that was pain, and was coming to be death, and I heard a voice which said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

"The shadow of a great rock in a weary land!" And my heart was weary by reason of the greatness of the way, and duties and tasks seemed toils and burdens, and I was ready to say, "Wherefore hast thou made me and all men in vain? Surely all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And I heard One that laid His hand upon me and said, "Come unto me, thou that labourest and art heavy laden, and I will give thee rest." I come to Thee, O Christ. Faint and perishing, defenceless and needy, with many a sin and many a fear, to Thee I turn, for Thou hast died for me, and for me Thou dost live. Be Thou my shelter and strong tower. Give me to drink of living water. Let me rest in Thee while in this weary land, and let Thy sweet love, my Brother and my Lord! be mine all on earth and the heaven of my heaven!

SERMON XI.

THE HAPPY HOPE.

Titus ii, 13.

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

THERE are two appearances spoken of in this context —the appearance of "the grace of God that bringeth salvation;" and parallel with that, though at the same time contrasted with it, as being in very important senses one in nature and principle, though diverse in purpose and diverse in manner, is what the Apostle here calls "the glorious appearing of the great God."

The antithesis of contrast and of parallel is still more striking in the original than in our version, where our translators have adopted a method of rendering of which they are very fond, and which very often obscures the full meaning of the text. Paul wrote, "Looking for that blessed (or 'happy') hope, even *the appearing of the glory* of the great God and our Saviour," where you see he contrasts, even more sharply than our Bible makes him do, the past appearance of the grace, and the future appearance of the glory.

Then, further, "this appearance of the glory," however bright with the terrible beauty and flashing lustre of Divine majesty it may be, seems to the Apostle to be infinitely desirable, and becomes to him a happy hope. The reality, when it comes, will be pure joy. The irradiation of its approach shines from afar on his brightening face, and lightens his heart with a hope which is a prophetic joy. And the attitude of the Christian soul towards it is to be that of glad expectation, watching the dawning east and ready to salute the sun.

And yet further, this attitude of happy expectation of the glory is one chief object to be attained by the grace that has appeared. It came "teaching," or rather (as the word more accurately means) "disciplining, that we should live looking for that happy hope."

So then, we have here for our consideration three points embodied in these words—The grace of God has appeared, the glory of God is to appear; the appearance of the glory is a blessed hope; the disciplining of the grace prepares us for the expectation of the glory.

I. First, then, take that thought—*The appearance of the grace leads to the appearance of the glory.*

The identity of the form of expression in the two clauses is intended to suggest the *likeness* of and the *connection* between the two appearances. In both there is a visible manifestation of God, and the latter rests upon the former, and completes and crowns it.

But the *difference* between the two is as strongly marked as the analogy; and it is not difficult to grasp distinctly the difference which the Apostle intends. While both

are manifestations of the Divine character in exercise, the specific phase (so to speak) of that character which appears is in one case "grace," and in the other "glory." If one might venture on any illustration in regard to such a subject, it is as when the pure white light is sent through glass of different colours, and at one moment beams mild through refreshing green, and at the next flames in fiery red that warns of danger.

The two words which are pitted against each other here have each a very wide range of meaning. But, as employed in this place, their antithetical force is clear enough. "Grace" is active love exercised towards inferiors, and towards those that deserve something else. So the grace of God is the active energy of His love, which stoops from the throne to move among men, and departing from the strict ground of justice and retribution, deals with us not according to our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities!

And then the contrasted word "glory" has not only a very wide meaning, but also a definite and specific force, which the very antithesis suggests. The "glory of God," I believe, in one very important sense, *is* His "grace." The highest glory of God is the exhibition of forgiving and long-suffering love. Nothing can be grander! Nothing can be more majestic! Nothing, in the very profoundest sense of the word, can be more truly Divine—more lustrous with all the beams of manifest Deity, than the gentle raying forth of His mercy and His goodness!

But then, while that is the profoundest thought of the

glory of God, there is another truth to be taken in conjunction with it. The phrase has, in Scripture, a well marked and distinct sense, which may be illustrated from the Old Testament, where it generally means not so much the total impression of majesty and power made upon men by the whole revealed Divine character, but rather the visible light which shone between the Cherubim and proclaimed the present God. Connected with this more limited sense is the wider one of that which the material light above the mercy seat symbolized—and which we have no better words to describe than to call it the Ineffable and Inaccessible Brightness of that awful Name.

The contrast between the two will be suggested by a passage to which I may refer. The ancient lawgiver said, "I beseech thee show me thy *glory*." The answer was, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee." The eye of man is incapable of apprehending the uncreated divine lustrousness and splendour of light, but capable of receiving some dim and partial apprehensions of the goodness, not indeed in its fulness, but in its consequences. And that goodness, though it be the brightest of "the glories that compose his name," is not the only possible, nor the only actual manifestation of the glory of God. The prayer was unfulfilled when offered; for to answer it, as is possible for earth, would have been to antedate the slow evolution of the counsels of God. But answered it will be, and that on this globe. "Every eye shall see him."

The grace has appeared, when Divine Love is incarnate

among us. The long-suffering gentleness we have seen. And in it we have seen, in a very real sense, the glory, for "we beheld his *glory*—full of *grace*." But beyond that lies ready to be revealed in the last time the glory, the lustrous light, the majestic splendour, the flaming fire of manifest Divinity.

Again, the two verses thus bracketed together, and brought into sharp contrast, also suggest how like, as well as how unlike, these manifestations are to be.

In both cases there is an appearance, in the strictest sense of the word, that is to say, a thing visible to men's senses. Can we see the grace of God? We can see the love in exercise, cannot we? How? "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" The appearance of Christ was the making visible, in human form, of the love of God.

My brother, the appearance of the glory will be the same,—the making visible in human form of the light of throned and sovereign Deity. The one was incarnation; the other will be incarnation. The one was patent to men's senses,—so will the other be. The grace has appeared. The glory *is* to appear. "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." An historical fact, a bodily visibility, a manifestation of the Divine nature and character in human form upon earth, and living and moving amongst men! As "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many," so "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." The two are strictly parallel. As the grace was

visible in action by a man among men, so the glory will be. What we look for is an actual bodily manifestation in a human form, on the solid earth, of the glory of God!

And then I would notice how emphatically this idea of the glory being all sphered and embodied in the living person of Jesus Christ proclaims His Divine nature. It is "the appearance of the glory"—then mark the next words—"of the great God and our Saviour."

I am not going to enter upon the question of the interpretation of these words, which, by many very competent authorities, have been taken as all referring to Jesus Christ, and as being a singular instance in Scripture of the attribution to Him directly, and without any explanation or modification, of the name "the great God!" I do not think that either grammar or dogma require that interpretation here. But I think that, if we take the words to refer distinctly to the Father and to the Son, the inference as to Christ's true and proper divinity which comes from them, so understood, is no less strong than the other interpretation would make it. For, in that case, the same one and indissoluble glory is ascribed to God the Father and to Christ our Lord, and the same act is the appearance of both. The Human possesses the Divine glory in such reality and fulness as it would be insanity if it were not blasphemy, and blasphemy if it were not absurdity, to predicate of any simple man. The words coincide with His own saying, "The Son of Man shall come in *his glory and of the Father*," and point us necessarily and inevitably to the wonderful thought that

the glory of God is capable of being fully imparted to, possessed by, and revealed through Jesus Christ; that the glory of God is Christ's glory, and the glory of Christ is God's. In deep, mysterious, real, eternal union the Father and the Son, the light and the ray, the fountain and the source, pour themselves out in loving-kindness on the world, and shall flash themselves in splendour at the last, when the Son of Man "shall be manifested in his own glory and of the Father!"

And, then, I must touch very briefly another remarkable and plain contrast indicated in our text between these two "appearings." They are not only unlike in the subject (so to speak) or substance of the manifestation, but also in the purpose. The grace comes, patient, gentle, sedulous, labouring for our training and discipline. The glory comes—there is no word of training there! What does the glory come for? The one rises upon a benighted world—lambent and lustrous and gentle, like the slow, silent, climbing of the silvery moon through the darkling sky. But the other blazes out with a leap upon a stormy heaven—"as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west," writing its fierce message across all the black page of the sky in one instant, "so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." Like some patient mother, the "grace of God" has moved amongst men, with entreaty, with loving rebuke, with loving chastisement. She has been counsellor and comforter. She has disciplined and fostered with more than maternal wisdom and love. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." But the glory appears for

another purpose and in another guise—"Who is this that cometh with dyed garments? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel? I have trodden the winepress alone—for the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come."

II. But we have now to look at the second thought which is involved in these words, and that is, *The appearing of the glory is a blessed hope.*

The hope is blessed; or, as we have already remarked, the word "happy" may, perhaps, be substituted with advantage. Because it will be full of blessedness when it is a reality, therefore it is full of joy while it is but a hope.

The characteristics of that future manifestation of glory are not such that its coming is wholly and universally a joy. There is something terrible in the beauty, something menacing in the brightness. But it is worth noticing that, notwithstanding all that gathers about it of terror, all that gathers about it of awful splendour, all that is solemn and heartshaking in the thought of judgment and retribution for the past, the irreversible and irrevocable past, yet to Paul it was the very crown of all his expectations of, and the very shining summit of all his desires for, the future—that Christ should appear.

The ancient church thought a great deal more about the coming of Jesus Christ than about death—thought a great deal more about His coming than about "Heaven." To them the future was not so much a

time of rest for themselves as the manifestation of their Lord. To them the way of passing out of life was not so much seeing corruption as being caught up together in the air.

And how far the darkness, which our Lord declared to be the Divine counsel in regard to that future coming, enwrapped even those who, upon all other points, received the Divine inspiration which made and makes them for evermore the infallible teachers and authorities for the Christian Church, is a moot question. If it were certain that the Apostle expected Christ's coming during His own lifetime, I do not know that we need be troubled at that as if it shook his authority, seeing that almost the last words which Christ spoke to His Apostles were a distinct declaration that He had not to reveal to them, and they were not to know "the times and the seasons which the Father has put in his own power," and seeing that the office of that Holy Spirit, as whose organs Paul and the other writers of the New Testament are our authoritative teachers, is expressly declared to be the bringing all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had revealed. If, then, He expressly excepts from the compass of His revelation this point, it can be no derogation from the completeness of an inspired writer's authority, if he knows it not.

And if one takes into account the whole of Paul's words on the subject, they seem to express rather the same double anticipation, which we, too, have to cherish, desiring and looking, on the one hand, for the Saviour from heaven; desiring on the other hand, to depart and

be with Christ, which is far better. The numerous places in which Paul speaks of his own decease, sometimes as longed for, sometimes as certain, and, latterly, as near, are inconsistent with the theory that he looked for Christ's coming as certain in his own lifetime. So, too, are other anticipations which he expresses as to the future course of the Church, and progress of the Gospel in the world. He, like us, would appear to have had before his expectations the alternative. He knew not when the glory might burst upon the world, therefore he was ever standing as one that waits for his Lord. He knew not when he might have to die, therefore he laboured that, "whether present or absent, he might be pleasing to him."

But that is not the point upon which I want to say a word. Dear brethren, the hope is a *happy* one. If we know "the grace," we shall not be afraid of "the glory." If the grace has disciplined in any measure, we may be sure that we shall partake in its perfection. They that have seen the face of Christ looking down, as it were, upon them from the midst of the great darkness of the cross, and beneath the crown of thorns, need not be afraid to see the same face looking down upon them from amidst all the blaze of the light, and from beneath the many crowns of the kingdoms of the world, and the royalties of the heavens. Whosoever hath learnt to love and believe in the manifestation of the grace, he, and he only, can believe and hope for the manifestation of the glory.

And, Christian men and women, whilst thus the one

ground upon which that assurance, "The Lord cometh," can be anything to us except a dread, if it is a belief at all, is the simple reliance upon his past work,—let me urge the further consideration upon you and myself, how shamefully all of us neglect and overlook that blessed expectation! *We* live by hope. God, indeed, is above all hope. To that infinite eye, before which all things that were, and are, and are to come, lie open and manifest, or, rather, are insphered in His own person and self; to Him who is the living past, the abiding present, the present future, there is no expectation. The animal creation is below hope. But for us that live on the central level—half-way between a beast and God, if I may so say—for us our lives are tossed about between memory and expectation.

We all of us possess, and most of us prostitute, that wonderful gift—of shaping out some conception of the future. And what do we do with it? It might knit us to God, bear us up amid the glories of the abysses of the skies. We use it for making to ourselves pictures of fools' paradises of present pleasures, or of successful earthly joys. The folly of men is not that they live by hope, but that they set their hopes on such things.

> "They build too low
> Who build beneath the stars!"

As for every other part of human nature, so for this strange faculty of our being the Gospel points to its true object, and the Gospel gives its only consecration. Dear brethren, is it true of us that into our hearts there steals subtle, impalpable, but quickening as the land breeze

laden with the fragrance of flowers to the sailor tossing on the barren sea, a hidden but yet mighty hope of an inheritance with Him,—when He shall appear? With eye lifted above and fixed upon the heavens do I look beyond the clouds into the stars? Alas! alas! the world drives that hope out of our hearts. It is with us as with the people in some rude country fair and scene of riot, where the booths, and the shows, and the drinking-places are pitched upon the edge of the common, and one step from the braying of the trumpets brings you into the solemn stillness of the night, and high above the stinking flare of the oil lamps there is the pure light of the stars in the sky, and not one amongst the many clowns that are stumbling about in the midst of sensual dissipation ever looks up to see that calm home that is arched above them!

We live for the present, do not we? And there, if only we would lift our eyes, there, even now, is the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. My friend, it is as much an element of a Christian's character, and a part of his plain imperative duty, to look for His appearing, as it is to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world!"

III. Well then, finally, one word about the last consideration here, viz., *The grace disciplines us to hope for the glory.*

The very idea of discipline involves the notion that it is a preparatory stage, a transient process for a permanent result. It carries with it the idea of immaturity, of apprenticeship, so to speak. If it is discipline, it is

discipline for some condition which is not yet reached. And so, if the grace of God comes "disciplining," then there must be something beyond the epoch and era within which the discipline is confined.

And that just runs out into two considerations, upon which I have not time to dwell. Take the characteristics of the grace—clearly enough, it is preparing men for something beyond itself. Yield to the discipline and the hope will grow.

Take the characteristics of the grace. Here is a great system, based upon a stupendous and inconceivable act of Divine sacrifice, involving a mysterious identification of the whole race of sinful men with the Saviour, embodying the most wonderful love of God, and being the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Here is a life perfectly innocent, perfectly stainless, brought to the extremity of evil, and having never swerved one inch from the Divine commandments, yet dying at last under a consciousness of separation and desertion from God! Here is a cross, a resurrection, an ascension, an omnipotent Spirit, an all-guiding Word, a whole series of powers and agencies brought to bear! Does any man believe that such a wealth of Divine energy and resource would be put forth and employed for purposes that break short off when a man is put into his coffin, and that have nothing beyond this world for their field?

Here is a perfect instrument for making men perfect, and what does it do? It makes men so good and leaves them so bad that unless they are to be made still better and perfected, God's work on the soul is at once an un-

paralleled success and a confounding failure—a puzzle, in that having done so much it does not do more; in that having done so little it has done so much. The achievements of Christianity upon single souls, and its failures upon those for whom it has done most, when measured against, and compared with, its manifest adaptation to a loftier issue than it has ever reached here on earth, all coincide to say,—the grace—because its purpose is discipline, and because its purpose is but partially achieved here on earth—*demands* a glory, when they whose darkness has been partially made "light in the Lord," by the discipline of grace, shall "blaze forth as the sun" in the Heavenly Father's Kingdom of Glory.

Yield to the discipline, and the hope will be strengthened. You will never entertain in any vigour and operative power upon your lives the expectation of that coming of the glory unless you live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

That discipline submitted to is, if I may so say, like that great apparatus which you find by the side of an astronomer's biggest telescope, to wheel it upon its centre and to point its tube to the star on which he would look. So our anticipation and desire, the faculty of expectation which we have, is wont to be directed along the low level of earth, and it needs the pinions and levers of that gracious discipline, making us sober, righteous, godly, in order to heave it upwards, full-front against the sky, that the stars may shine into it.

The speculum, the object-glass, must be polished and cut by many a stroke and much friction ere it will reflect

"the image of the heavenly"; so grace disciplines us, patiently, slowly, by repeated strokes, by much rubbing, by much pain—disciplines us to live in self-restraint, in righteousness and godliness, and then the cleared eye beholds the heavens, and the purged heart grows towards "the coming" as its hope and its life.

Dear brethren, let us not fling away the treasures of our hearts' desires upon trifles and earth. Let us not "set our hopes on that which is not," nor paint that misty wall that rings round our present with evanescent colours like the landscapes of a dream. We may have a hope which is a certainty, as sure as a history, as vivid as a present fact. Let us love and trust to Him who has been manifested to save us from our sins, and in whom we behold all the grace and truth of God. If our eyes have learned to behold and our hearts to love Him whom we have not seen, amid all the bewildering glares and false appearances of the present, our hopes will happily discern Him and be at rest, amid the splendours of that solemn hour when He shall come in His glory to render to every man according to His works.

With that hope the future, near or far, has no fears hidden in its depths. Without it, there is no real anchorage for our trembling hearts, and nothing to hold by when the storm comes. The alternative is before each of us, "having *no* hope," or "looking for that blessed hope." God help us all to believe that Christ *has* come for me! Then I shall be glad when I think that Christ will come again to receive me unto Himself!

SERMON XII.

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE.

PSALM xlviii.

(1) Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. (2) Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. (3) God is known in her palaces for a refuge.

(4) For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. (5) They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. (6) Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. (7) Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. (8) As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever.

(9) We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. (10) According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. (11) Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. (12) Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. (13) Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces: that ye may tell it to the generation following. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

THE enthusiastic triumph which throbs in this Psalm, and the specific details of a great act of deliverance from a great peril which it contains, sufficiently indicate that it must have had some historical event as its basis. Can we identify the fact which is here embalmed?

The Psalm gives these points—a formidable muster before Jerusalem of hostile people under confederate kings, with the purpose of laying siege to the city; some mysterious check which arrests them before a sword is drawn, as if some panic fear had shot from its towers and shaken their hearts; and a flight in wild confusion from the impregnable dwelling-place of the Lord of hosts. The occasion of the terror is vaguely hinted at, as if some solemn mystery brooded over it. All that is clear about it is that it was purely the work of the Divine hand—"Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind;" and that in this deliverance, in their own time, the Levite minstrels recognized the working of the same protecting grace which, from of old, had "commanded deliverances for Jacob."

Now there is one event, and only one, in Jewish history, which corresponds, point for point, to these details—the crushing destruction of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. There, there was the same mustering of various nations, compelled by the conqueror to march in his train, and headed by their tributary kings. There, there was the same arrest before an arrow had been shot, or a mound raised against the city. There, there was the same purely Divine agency coming in to destroy the invading army.

I think, then, that from the correspondence of the history with the requirements of the Psalm, as well as from several similarities of expression and allusion between the latter and the prophecies of Isaiah, who has recorded that destruction of the invader, we may, with

considerable probability, regard this Psalm as the hymn of triumph over the baffled Assyrian, and the marvellous deliverance of Israel by the arm of God.

Whatever may be thought, however, of that allocation of it to a place in the history, the great truths that it contains depend upon no such identification. They are truths for all time; gladness and consolation for all generations. Let us read it over together this morning, if, perchance, some echo of the confidence and praise that is found in it may be called forth from our hearts! If you will look at your Bibles you will find that it falls into three portions. There is the glory of Zion, the deliverance of Zion, and the consequent grateful praise and glad trust of Zion.

I. There is *the glory of Zion.* Hearken with what triumph the Psalmist breaks out: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation (or rather elevation), the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King."

Now these words are something more than mere patriotic feeling. The Jew's glory in Jerusalem was a different thing altogether from the Roman's pride in Rome. To the devout men amongst them, of whom the writer of this Psalm was one, there was one thing, and one only, that made Zion glorious. It was beautiful indeed in its elevation, lifted high upon its rocky mountain. It was safe indeed, isolated from the invader by the precipitous ravines which inclosed and guarded the angle of the mountain plateau on which it stood; but *the one*

thing that gave it glory was that in *it* God abode. The name even of that earthly Zion was "Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there." And the emphasis of these words is entirely pointed in that direction. What they celebrate concerning *Him* is not merely the general thought that the Lord is great, but that the Lord is *great in Zion*. What they celebrate concerning *it* is that it is His city, the mountain of His holiness, where He dwells, where He manifests Himself. Because there is His self-manifestation, therefore He is there greatly to be praised. And because the clear voice of His praise rings out from Zion, therefore is she "the joy of the whole earth."

The Glory of Zion, then, is that it is the dwelling-place of God.

Now, remember, that when the Old Testament Scripture speaks about God abiding in Jerusalem, it means no heathenish or material localizing of the Deity, nor does it imply any depriving of the rest of the earth of the sanctity of His presence. The very Psalm which most distinctly embodies the thought of God's abode protests against that narrowness, for it begins, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof: the world and they that dwell therein." The very ark which was the symbol of His presence, protests by its name against all such localizing, for the name of it was "the ark of the covenant of the God of the whole earth." When the Bible speaks of Zion as the dwelling-place of God, it is but the expression of the fact that there, between the cherubim, was the visible sign of His presence—that there, in the Temple, as from the centre of the whole land,

He ruled, and "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shone."

We are, then, not "spiritualizing," or forcing a New Testament meaning into these words, when we see in them an Eternal Truth. We are but following in the steps of history and prophecy, and Christ and His Apostles, and that last vision of the Apocalypse. We are but distinguishing between an idea and the fact which more or less perfectly embodies it. An idea may have many garments, may transmigrate into many different material forms. The idea of the dwelling of God with men had its less perfect embodiment, has its more perfect embodiment, will have its absolutely perfect embodiment. It had its less perfect in that ancient time. It has its real but partial embodiment in this present time, when, in the midst of the whole community of believing and loving souls, which stretches wider than any society that calls itself a church, the living God abides and energizes by His spirit and by His Son in the souls of them that believe upon Him. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God." And we wait for the time when, filling all the air with its light, there shall come down from God a perfect and permanent form of that dwelling; and that great city, the New Jerusalem, "having the glory of God," shall appear, and He will dwell with men and be their God. But in all these stages of the embodiment of that great truth the glory of Zion rests in this, that in it God abides, that from it He flames in the greatness of His manifestations, which are "his praise in all the earth." It is that presence which makes her fair,

as it is that presence which keeps her safe. It is that light shining within her palaces—not their own opaque darkness, which streams out far into the waste night with ruddy glow of hospitable invitation. It is God in her, not anything of her own, that constitutes her "the joy of the whole earth." "Thy beauty was perfect, through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord." Zion is where hearts love and trust and follow Christ. The "city of the great King" is a permanent reality in a partial form upon earth—and that partial form is itself a prophecy of the perfection of the heavens.

II. Still further, there is a second portion of this Psalm which, passing beyond these introductory thoughts of the glory of Zion, recounts with wonderful power and vigour the process of *the deliverance of Zion.*

It extends from the fourth to the eighth verses.

Mark the dramatic vigour of the description of the deliverance. There is, first, the mustering of the armies —"The kings were assembled." Some light is thrown upon that phrase by the proud boast which the prophet Isaiah puts into the lips of the Assyrian invader, "Are not my princes altogether kings?" The subject-monarchs of the subdued nationalities that were gathered round the tyrant's standard were used, with the wicked craft of conquerors in all ages, to bring still other lands under the same iron dominion. "The kings were assembled"—we see them gathering their far-reaching and motley army, mustered from all corners of that gigantic empire. They advance together against the rocky fortress that towers above its girdling valleys. "They saw it, they marvelled."

—in wonder, perhaps, at its beauty, as they first catch sight of its glittering whiteness from some hill crest on their march; or, perhaps, stricken by some strange amazement, as if, basilisk-like, its beauty were deadly, and a beam from the Shechinah had shot a nameless awe into their souls—"they were troubled, they hasted away."

I need not dilate on the power of this description, nor do more than notice how the abruptness of the language, huddled together, as it were, without connecting particles, conveys the impression of hurry and confusion, culminating in the rush of fugitives fleeing under the influence of panic-terror. They are like the well-known words, "I came, I saw, I conquered," only that here we have to do with swift defeat—they came, they saw, they were conquered. They are, in regard to vivid picturesqueness, arising from the broken construction, singularly like other words which refer to the same event in the forty-sixth Psalm, "The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted." In their scornful emphasis of triumph they remind us of Isaiah's description of the end of the same invasion—"So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh."

Mark, still further, the eloquent silence as to the cause of the panic and the flight. There is no appearance of armed resistance. This is no "Battle of the warrior with garments rolled in blood," and the shock of contending hosts. But an unseen hand smites once—"and when the morning dawned they were all dead corpses." The impression of terror produced by such a

blow is increased by the veiled allusion to it here. The silence magnifies the deliverance. If we might apply the grand words of Milton to that night of fear—

> "The trumpet spake not to the armed throng,
> But kings sat still, with awful eye,
> As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by."

The process of the deliverance is not told here, as there was no need it should be in a hymn which is not history, but the lyrical echo of what is told in history; one image explains it all—"Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." The metaphor—one that does not need expansion here—is that of a ship like a great unwieldy galleon, caught in a tempest. However strong for fight, it is not fit for sailing. Like some of those turret ships of ours, if they venture out from the coast and get into a storm, their very strength is their destruction, their armour wherein they trusted ensures that they shall sink.

And so, this huge assailant of Israel, this great "galley with oars," washing about there in the trough of the sea, as it were—God broke it in two with the tempest, which is His breath. You remember how on the medal that commemorated the destruction of the Spanish Armada—our English deliverance—there were written the words of Scripture: "God blew upon them and they were scattered." What was there true, literally, is here true in figure. The Psalmist is not thinking of any actual scattering of hostile fleets—from which Jerusalem was never in danger; but is using the shipwreck of "the ship of Tarshish" as a picture of the utter, swift, God-inflicted

destruction which ground that invading army to pieces, as the savage rocks and wild seas will do the strongest craft that is mangled between them.

And then, mark how from this dramatic description there rises a loftier thought still. The deliverance thus described *links the present with the past.* "As we have heard so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God."

Yes, brethren, God's merciful manifestation for ourselves, as for those Israelitish people of old, has this blessed effect, that it changes hearsay and tradition into living experience;—this blessed effect, that it teaches us, or ought to teach us, the inexhaustibleness of the Divine power, the constant repetition in every age of the same works of love. Taught by it, we learn that all these old narratives of His grace and help are ever new, not past and gone, but ready to be reproduced in their essential characteristics in our lives too. "We have heard with our ears, O Lord, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days." And is the record only a melancholy contrast with our own experience? Nay, truly. "As we have heard so have we seen."

We are ever tempted to think of the present as commonplace. The sky is always farthest from earth right above our heads. It is at the horizon behind and the horizon in front, where earth and heaven seem to blend. We think of miracles in the past, we think of a manifest presence of God in the future, but the present ever seems to our sense-bound understandings as beggared and empty of Him, devoid of His light. But this verse suggests to us

how, if we mark the daily dealings of that loving Hand with us, we have every occasion to say, Thy loving kindness of old lives still. Still, as of old, the hosts of the Lord encamp round about them that fear Him to deliver them. Still, as of old, the voice of guidance comes from between the cherubim. Still, as of old, the pillar of cloud and fire moves before us. Still, as of old, angels walk with men. Still, as of old, His hand is stretched forth to bless, to feed, to guard. Nothing in the past of God's dealings with men has passed away. The eternal present embraces what we call the past, present, and future. They that went before do not prevent us on whom the ends of the ages are come. The table that was spread for them is as fully furnished for the latest guests. The light, which was so magical and lustrous in the morning beauty, for us has not faded away into the light of common day. The river which flowed in these past ages has not been drunk up by the thirsty sands. The fire that once blazed so clear has not died down into grey ashes. "The God of *Jacob* is *our* refuge." "As we have heard so have we seen."

And then, still further, the deliverance here is suggested as not only linking most blessedly the present with the past, but also linking it for our confidence with all the *future*. "God will establish it for ever."

> "Old experience doth attain
> To something of prophetic strain."

In the strength of what that moment taught of God and His power, the singer looks onward, and whatever may be the future he knows that the Divine arm will be outstretched.

God will establish Zion; or, as the word might be translated, God will hold it erect, as if with a strong hand grasping some pole or banner-staff that else would totter and fall—He will keep it up, standing there firm and steadfast.

It would lead us too far to discuss the bearing of such a prophecy upon the future history and restoration of Israel, but the bearing of it upon the security and perpetuity of the Church is unquestionable. The city is immortal because God dwells in it. For the individual and for the community, for the great society and for each of the single souls that make it up, the history of the past may seal the pledge which He gives for the future. If it had been possible to destroy the church of the living God, it had been gone long, long ago. Its own weakness and sin, the ever-new corruptions of its belief and paring of its creed, the imperfections of its life and the worldliness of its heart, the abounding evils that lie around it and the actual hostility of many that look upon it and say, Raze it, even to the ground, would have smitten it to the dust long since. It lives, it has lived in spite of all, and therefore it shall live. "God will establish it for ever."

In almost every land there is some fortress or other, which the pride of the inhabitants calls "the maiden fortress," and whereof the legend is, that it has never been taken, and is inexpugnable by any foe. It is true about the tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion. The grand words of Isaiah about this very Assyrian invader are our answer to all fears within and foes without: "Say unto him, the virgin, the

daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, *and* laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. . . . . I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake." "God will establish it for ever." And the pledges of that Eternal Stability are the deliverances of the past and of the present!

III. Then, finally, there is still another section of this Psalm to be looked at for a moment, which deals with *the consequent grateful praise and glad trust of Zion.*

I must condense what few things I have to say about these closing verses. The deliverance, first of all, deepens the glad meditation on God's favour and defence. "We have thought," say the ransomed people, as with a sigh of rejoicing, "we have thought of thy loving-kindness in the midst of thy temple." The scene of the manifestation of His power is the scene of their thankfulness, and the first issue of His mercy is His servants' praise.

Then, the deliverance spreads His fame throughout the world. "According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth. Thy right hand is full of righteousness." The name of God is God's own making known of His character, and the thought of these words is double. They most beautifully express the profoundest trust in that blessed name that it only needs to be known in order to be loved. There is nothing wanted but His manifestation of Himself for His praise and glory to spread. Why is the Psalmist so sure that according to the revelation of His character will be the

revenue of His praise? Because the Psalmist is so sure that that character is purely, perfectly, simply good—nothing else but good and blessing—and that He cannot act but in such a way as to magnify Himself. That great sea will cast up nothing on the shores of the world but pearls and precious things. He is all "light, and in Him is no darkness at all." There needs but the shining forth in order that the light of His character shall bring gladness and joy, and the song of birds, and opening flowers wheresoever it falls.

Still further, there is the other truth in the words, that we misapprehend the purpose of our own deliverances, and the purpose of God's mercy to Zion, if we confine these to any personal objects or lose sight of the loftier end of them all—that men may learn to know and love Him.

Brethren, we neither rightly thank Him for His gifts to us nor rightly apprehend the meaning of His dealings, unless the sweetest thought to us, even in the midst of our own personal joy for deliverance, is not "we are saved," but, "God is exalted."

And then, beyond that, the deliverance produces in Zion, the mother city and her daughter villages, a triumph of rapture and gladness. "Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad because of thy judgments." Yes, even though an hundred and four score and five thousand dead men lay there, they were to be glad. Solemn and awful as is the baring of his righteous sword, it is an occasion for praise. It is right to be glad when men and systems that hinder and fight against God are swept away as with the besom of destruction. "When

the wicked perish there is shouting." And the fitting epitaph for the oppressors to whom the surges of the Red Sea are shroud and gravestone is, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

The last verses set forth, more fully than even the preceding ones, the height and perfectness of the confidence which the manifold mercies of God ought to produce in men's hearts. The citizens who have been cooped up during the invasion, and who, in the temple, as we have seen, have been rendering the tribute of their meditation and thankful gratitude to God for His lovingkindness, are now called upon to come forth from the enclosure of the besieged city, and free from all fear of the invading army, to "walk about Zion, and go round about her and tell the towers," and "mark her bulwarks" and palaces.

They look first at the defences, on which no trace of assault appears, and then at the palaces guarded by them, that stand shining and unharmed. The deliverance has been so complete that there is not a sign of the peril or the danger left. It is not like a city besieged, and the siege raised when the thing over which contending hosts have been quarrelling has become a ruin, but not one stone has been smitten from the walls, nor one agate chipped in the windows of the palaces. It is unharmed as well as uncaptured.

Thus, we may say, no matter what tempests assail us, the wind will but sweep the rotten branches out of the tree. Though war should arise, nothing will be touched that belongs to Thee. We have a city which cannot be moved; and the removal of the things which can be

shaken but makes more manifest its impregnable security, its inexpugnable peace. As in war they will clear away the houses and the flower gardens that have been allowed to come and cluster about the walls and fill up the moat, yet the walls will stand; so in all the conflicts that befall God's church and God's truth, the calming thought ought to be ours: if anything perishes it is a sign that it is not His, but man's excrescence on His building. Whatever is His will stand for ever.

And then, with wonderful tenderness and beauty, the Psalm in its last words drops, as one might say, in one aspect, and in another, *rises* from its contemplations of the immortal city and the community to the thought of the individuals that make it up: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death." Prosaic commentators have often said that these last two words are an interpolation, that they do not fit into the strain of the Psalm, and have troubled themselves to find out what meaning to attach to them, because it seemed to them so unlikely that, in a hymn that had only to do with the community, we should find this expression of individual confidence in anticipation of that most purely personal of all evils. That seems to me the very reason for holding fast by the words as being a genuine part of the Psalm, because they express a truth, without which the confident hope of the Psalm, grand as it is, is but poor consolation for each heart. It is not enough for passing, perishing men to say, "Never mind your own individual fate: the society, the community, will stand fast and firm."

I want something more than to know that God will establish Zion for ever. What about *me*, my own individual self? And the last words answer that. Not merely the city abides, but "He will be *our guide even unto death.*" And surely, if so—if His loving hand will lead the citizens of His eternal kingdom even to the edge of that great darkness,—He will not lose them even in its gloom. Surely there is here the veiled hope that if the city be eternal and the gates of the grave cannot prevail against *it*, the community cannot be eternal unless the individuals be immortal.

Such a hope is vindicated by the blessed words of a newer revelation: "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city."

Dear brethren, remember the last words, or all but the last words of Scripture which, in their true text and reading, tell us how, instead of aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, we may become fellow-citizens with the saints. "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gate into the city!"

SERMON XIII.

CHRIST HASTENING TO THE CROSS.

LUKE ix, 51.

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

THERE are some difficulties, with which I need not trouble you here, as to bringing the section of this Gospel to which these words are the introduction, into its proper chronological place in relation to the narratives; but, putting these on one side for the present, there seems no doubt that the Evangelist's intention here is to represent the beginning of our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem—a journey which was protracted and devious, and the narrative of which in this Gospel, as you will perceive, occupies a very large portion of its whole contents.

The picture that is given in my text is that of a clear knowledge of what waited Him, of a steadfast resolve to accomplish the purpose of the Divine love, and that resolve not without such a shrinking of some part of His nature that He had "to *set* His face to go to Jerusalem."

The words come into parallelism very strikingly with

a great prophecy of the Messiah in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, where we read, "The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded"—or, as the words have been rendered, "shall not suffer myself to be overcome by mockery"—"therefore have I set my face like a flint." In both the words of the Prophet and of the Evangelist there is the same idea of a resolved will, as the result of a conscious effort directed to prevent circumstances which tended to draw Him back from producing their effect. The graphic narrative of the Evangelist Mark adds one more striking point to that picture of high resolve. He tells us, speaking of what appears to be the final epoch in this long journey to the cross, "They were in the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed: and as they followed, they were afraid." What a picture that is, Christ striding along the steep mountain path far in advance—impelled by that same longing which sighs so wonderfully in His words, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished,"—with solemn determination in the gentle face, and His feet making haste to run in the way of the Father's commandments! And lagging behind, the little group, awed into almost stupor, and shrinking in uncomprehending terror from that light of unconquerable resolve and more than mortal heroism that blazed in His eyes!

If we fix, then, on this picture, and, as we are warranted in doing, regard it as giving us a glimpse of the very heart of Christ, I think it may well suggest to us considerations that may tend to make more real to us that

sacrifice that He made, more deep to us that love by which He was impelled, and may, perhaps, tend to make our love more true and our resolve more fixed. "He *set* his face to go to Jerusalem."

I. First, then, we may take, I think, from these words, the thought of *the perfect clearness with which all through Christ's life He foresaw the inevitable and purposed end.*

Here, indeed, the Evangelist leaps over the suffering of the cross, and thinks only of the time when He shall be lifted up upon the throne; but in that calm and certain prevision which, in His manhood, the Divine Son of God did exercise concerning His own earthly life, between Him and the glory there ever stood the black shadow thrown by Calvary. When He spoke of being "lifted up," He ever meant by that pregnant and comprehensive word, at once man's elevation of Him on the accursed tree, and the Father's elevation of Him upon the throne at His right hand! The future was, if I may so say, in His eye so foreshortened that the two things ran into one, and the ambiguous expression did truly connote the one undivided act of prescient consciousness in which He at once recognized the cross and the throne. "And so, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."

Now, there is another thing to be noticed. That vision of the certain end which here fills His mind and impels His conduct, was by no means new with Him. Modern unbelieving commentators and critics upon the Gospels have tried their best to represent Christ's life as,

at a certain point in it, being modified by His recognition of the fact that His mission was a failure, and that there was nothing left for Him but martyrdom! I believe that that is as untrue to the facts of the Gospel story upon any interpretation of them, as it is repulsive to the instincts of devout hearts; and without troubling you with thoughts about it I need only refer to two words of His. When was it that He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up"? When was it that He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up"? The one saying was uttered at the very beginning of His public work, and the other in His conversation with Nicodemus. On the testimony of these two sayings, if there were none else, I think there is no option but to believe that from the first there stood clear before Him the necessity and the certainty of the cross, and that it was no discovery made at a certain point of the course.

And then, remember that we are not to think of Him as, like many an earthly hero and martyr, regarding a violent and bloody death as being the very probable result of faithful boldness, but to believe that He, looking on from the beginning to that end, regarded it always as being laid upon Him by a certain Divine necessity, into which necessity He entered with the full submission and acquiescence of His own will, and from the beginning knew that Calvary was the work for which He had come, and that His love failed of its expression, and the Divine purpose failed of its realization, and His whole mission failed of all its meaning, unless He died for men.

The martyr looks to the scaffold and says, "It stands in my way, and I must either be untrue to conscience or I must go there, and so I will go." Christ said, "The cross is in my path, and on it and from it I exercise the influence, to exercise which I have come into the world, and there I *do* the thing which I came forth from the Father to do." He thought of His death not as the end of His work, but as the centre-point of it; not as the termination of His activity, but as its climax, to which all the rest was subordinated, and without which all the rest was naught. He does not die, and so seal a faithful life by an heroic death,—but dies, so bearing and bearing away man's sin. He regarded from the beginning "the glory that should follow," and the suffering through which he had to wade to reach it, in one and the same act of prescience, and said, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me."

And I think, dear friends, if we carried with us more distinctly than we do that one simple thought, that in all the human joys, in all the apparently self-forgetting tenderness, of that Lord who had a heart for every sorrow and an ear for every complaint, and a hand open as day and full of melting charity for every need—that in every moment of that life, in the boyhood, in the dawning manhood, in the maturity of His growing human power—there was always present one black shadow, towards which He ever went straight with the consent of His will and the clearest eye, we should understand something more of how the life as well as the death was a sacrifice for us sinful men!

We honour and love men who crush down their own sorrows in order to help their fellows. We wonder with almost reverence when we see some martyr, in sight of the faggots, pause to do a kindness to some weeping heart in the crowd, or to speak a cheering word. We admire the leisure and calm of spirit which he displays. But all these pale, and the very comparison may become an insult, before that heart which ever discerned Calvary, and never let the sight hinder one deed of kindness, nor silence one gracious word, nor check one throb of sympathy.

II. Still further, the words before us lead to a second consideration, which I have just suggested in my last sentence—*Our Lord's perfect willingness for the sacrifice which He saw before Him.*

We have here brought into the narrowest compass, and most clearly set forth, the great standing puzzle of all thought, which can only be solved by action. On the one side there is the distinctest knowledge of a Divine purpose that *will* be executed; on the other side there is the distinctest consciousness that at each step towards the execution of it He is constrained by no foreign and imposed necessity, but is going to the cross by His own will. "The Son of Man must be lifted up." "It *became* him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through sufferings." "It *behoved* him to be made in all points like his brethren." The Eternal Will of the Father, the purpose purposed before the foundation of the world, the solemn prophecies from the beginning of time, constituted the necessity, and involved the certainty, of His death on the Cross.

But are we, therefore, to think that Jesus Christ was led along the path that ended there, by a force which overbore and paralysed His human will? Was not His life, and especially His death, *obedience?* Was there not, therefore, in Him, as in us all, the human will that could cheerfully submit; and must there not, then, have been, at each step towards the certain end, a fresh act of submission and accepting the will of the Father that had sent Him?

Clear knowledge of the end as Divinely appointed and certain! Yes, one might say, and if so, there could have been no voluntariness in treading the path that leads to it. Voluntariness in treading the path that leads to it, and if so, there could have been no Divine ordination of the end. Not so! When human thought comes, if I may so say, full butt against a stark, staring contradiction like that, it is no proof that either of the propositions is false. It is only like the sign-boards that the icemen put upon the thin ice, "dangerous!" a warning that that is not a place for us to tread. We have to keep a firm hold of what is certified to us, on either side, by its appropriate evidence, and leave the reconciliation, if it can ever be given to finite beings, to a higher wisdom, and, perchance, to another world!

But that is a digression from my more immediate purpose, which is simply to bring before our minds, as clearly as I can, that perfect, continuous, ever repeated willingness, expressing itself in a chain of constant acts that touch one upon the other, that Christ manifested to embrace the cross, and to accomplish what was at once

the purpose of the Father's will and the purpose of His own.

And it may be worth while, just for a moment, to touch lightly upon some of the many points which bring out so clearly in these Gospel narratives the wholly and purely voluntary character of Christ's death.

Take, for instance, the very journey I am speaking about now. Christ went up to Jerusalem, says my text. What did He go there for? He went, as you will see, if you look at the previous circumstance,—He went in order, if I might use such a word, to precipitate the collision, and to make His crucifixion certain! He was under the ban of the Sanhedrim; but perfectly safe as long as He had stopped down among the hills of Galilee. He was as unsafe when He went up to Jerusalem as John Huss when he went to the Council of Constance with the Emperor's safe-conduct in his belt; or as a condemned heretic would have been in the old days, if he had gone and stood in that little dingy square outside the palace of the Inquisition at Rome, and there, below the obelisk, preached his heresies! Christ had been condemned in the council of the nation; but there were plenty of hiding-places among the Galilean hills, and the frontier was close at hand, and it needed a long arm to reach from Jerusalem all the way across Samaria to the far North. Knowing that, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and, if I might use the expression, went straight into the lion's mouth. Why? Because He chose to die.

And, then, take another circumstance. If you will look

carefully at the Scripture narrative, you will find that from about this point in His life onwards there comes a distinct change in one very important respect. Before then He shunned publicity; after this He courted it. Before then, when He spoke in veiled words of His sufferings, He said to His disciples, "Tell no man till the Son of Man be risen from the dead." Hereafter, though there be frequent prophecies of His sufferings, there is no repetition of that prohibition. He goes up to Jerusalem, and that triumphal entry adds fuel to the fire. His language at the last moment appeals to the publicity of His final visit to that city—"Was I not daily with you in the temple, and ye laid no hands upon me?" Everything that He could do He does to draw attention to Himself—everything, that is to say, within the limits of the Divine decorum, which was ever observed in His life, of whom it was written long, long ago, "He shall not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets." There is, then, a most unmistakable change to be felt by any who will carefully read the narratives in their bearing upon this one point—a resolve to draw the eyes of the enemy upon Himself.

And to the same purpose, did you ever notice how calmly, with full self-consciousness, distinctly understanding what He is doing, distinctly knowing to what it will lead, He makes His words ever heavier and heavier, and more and more sharply pointed with denunciations, as the last loving wrestle between Himself and the scribes and Pharisees draws near to its bloody close? Instead of softening He hardens His tones—if I dare use the

word, where all is the result of love—at any rate He keeps no terms; but as the danger increases His words become plainer and sterner, and approach as near as ever *His* words could do to bitterness and rebuke. It was then, whilst passionate hate was raging round Him, and eager eyes were gleaming revenge, that He poured out His sevenfold woes upon the "hypocrites," the "blind guides," the "fools," the "whited sepulchres," the "serpents," the "generation of vipers," whom He sees filling up the measure of their fathers in shedding His righteous blood.

And again, the question recurs—Why? And again, besides other reasons, which I have not time to touch upon here, the answer, as it seems to me, must unmistakably be, Because He willed to die, and He willed to die because He loved us!

The same lesson is taught, too, by that remarkable incident preserved for us by the Gospel of John, of the strange power which accompanied His avowal of Himself to the rude soldiers who had come to seize Him, and struck them to the ground in terror and impotence. One flash comes forth to tell of the sleeping lightning that He will not use, and then having revealed the might that could have delivered Him from their puny arms, He returns to His attitude of self-surrender for our sakes, with those wonderful words which tell how He gave up Himself that we might be free, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." The scene is a parable of the whole work of Jesus; it reveals His power to have shaken off every hand laid upon Him, His voluntary submission to His

else impotent murderers, and the love which moved Him to the surrender.

Other illustrations of the same sort I must leave untouched at present, and only remind you of the remarkable peculiarity of the language in which all the Evangelists describe the supreme moment when Christ passed from His sufferings. "When He had cried with a loud voice, He yielded up the ghost,"—He sent away the Spirit—"He breathed out" (the Spirit), "He gave up the ghost." In simple truth, He "committed his Spirit" into the Father's hand. And I believe that it is an accurate and fair comment to say, that that is no mere euphemism for death, but carries with it the thought that He was *active* in that moment; that the nails and the spear and the cross did not kill Christ, but that Christ *willed* to die! And though it is true on the one side, as far as men's hatred and purpose are concerned, "Whom with wicked hand ye have crucified and slain:" on the other side, as far as the deepest verity of the fact is concerned, it is still more true, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

But at all events, whatever you may think of such an exposition as that, the great principle which my text illustrates for us at an earlier stage is, at least, irrefragably established—that our dear Lord, when He died, died, because He *willed* to do so. He was man and therefore He *could* die; but He was not man in such fashion as that He *must* die. In His bodily frame was the possibility, not the necessity, of death. And that being so, the very fact of His death is the most signal

proof that He is Lord of death as well as of life. He dies not because He must, He dies not because of faintness and pain and wounds. These and they who inflicted them had no power at all over Him. He chooses to die; and He wills it because He wills to fulfil the eternal purpose of Divine love, which is His purpose, and to bring life to the world. His hour of weakness was His hour of strength. They lifted Him on a cross, and it became a throne. In the moment when Death seemed to conquer Him, He was really using it that He might abolish it. When He gave up the ghost, He showed Himself Lord of death as marvellously and as gloriously as when He burst its bands and rose from the grave; for this grisly shadow, too, was His servant, and He says to him, "Come, and he cometh; do this, and he doeth it." Thou didst overcome the sharpness of death when Thou didst willingly bow Thy head to it, and didst die, not because Thou *must*, but because Thou *wouldest*.

III. Still further, let me remind you how, in the language of this verse, there is also taught us that *there was in Christ a Natural Human Shrinking from the Cross*.

That steadfast and resolved will held its own, overcoming the natural human reluctance. "He *set* His face." People are afraid to talk—and the instinct, the reverent instinct, is right, howsoever we may differ from the application of it—people are afraid to talk, as if there was any shrinking in Christ from the Cross. I believe there was. Was the agony in Gethsemane a reality or a shadow, when He said, "O my Father, if it be possible,

let this cup pass"? What did that prayer mean if there was not something in His nature that recoiled from the agony and mysterious horror of these awful hours? Let us take heed lest in our reverence we destroy the very notion on which our hope rests—that of Christ as suffering. For that one word involves all that I say—Did Christ *suffer* or did He not? If he suffered, then human nature shrank from it. The two ideas are correlative. You cannot part them—suffering and reluctance. A perfectly innocent, natural, inevitable, human instinct, inseparable from corporeity, that makes men recoil from pain. "He endured the Cross," says the Book—if there were not reluctance what was there to "endure"? "Despising the shame"—if there was not something from which He shrank, what was there to "despise"? "He *set* his face"—if there was not something that hung back, what need was there for the hardening of the countenance? If Christ has suffered, then His flesh and blood quivered beforehand with the pangs and shrank from these, and He would have been spared the cup. Such instinctive recoil is not evil, it is not rebellion, it is not unwillingness to submit to the Father's will. His whole Being clave to that, and never swerved from it for one moment. But still, because the path was darkened by mysterious blackness, and led to a Cross, therefore He, even He, who did always the things that pleaseth the Father, and ever delighted to do His will, needed to "*set* his face" to go up to the mountain of sacrifice.

And now, if you will take along with that the other thought that I suggested at the beginning of these

remarks, and remember that this shrinking must have been as continuous as the vision, and that this overcoming of it must have been as persistent and permanent as the resolve, I think we get a point of view from which to regard that life of Christ's—full of pathos, full of tender appeals to our hearts and to our thankfulness.

All along that consecrated road He walked, and each step represents a separate act of will, and each separate act of will represents a triumph over the reluctance of flesh and blood. As we may say, every time he planted His foot on the flinty path the blood flowed. Every step was a pain like that of a man enduring the ordeal and walking on burning iron or sharp steel.

The old taunt of His enemies, as they stood beneath His cross, might have been yielded to—"If thou be the Son of God, come down and we will believe." I ask why did not He? I know that, to those who think less loftily of Christ than we who believe Him to be the Son of God, the words sound absurd—but I for one believe that the only thing that kept Him there, the only answer to that question is—Because He loved me with an everlasting love, and died to redeem me. Because of that love, He came to earth; because of that love, He tabernacled among us; because of that love, He gazed all His life long on the cross of shame; because of that love, He trod unfaltering, with eager haste and solemn resolve, the rough and painful road; because of that love, He listened not to the voice that at the beginning tempted Him to win the world for Himself by an easier path; because of that love, He listened not—though he could have done it

—to the voices that at the end taunted Him with their proffered allegiance if He would come down from the Cross ; because of that love, He gave up His Spirit. And through all the weariness and contumely and pain, that love held His will fixed to its purpose, and bore Him over every hindrance that barred His path. Many waters quench it not. *That* love is stronger than death ; mightier than all opposing powers ; deep and great beyond all thought or thankfulness. It silences all praise. It beggars all recompense. To believe it is life. To feel it is heaven.

But one more remark I would make on this whole subject. We are far too much accustomed to think of our Saviour as presenting only the gentler graces of human nature. He presents those that belong to the strong side of our nature just as much. In Him is all power, manly energy, resolved consecration ; everything which men call heroism is there. "He steadfastly set his face." And everything which men call tenderest love, most dewy pity, most marvellous and transcendent patience, *it* is all there too. The type of manhood and the type of womanhood are both and equally in Jesus Christ; and He is *the* man, whole, entire, perfect, with all power breathed forth in all gentleness, with all gentleness made steadfast and mighty by His strength. "And he said unto me, Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah. And I beheld, and lo, a lamb!"—the blended symbols of kingly might, and lowly meekness—power in love, and love in power. The supremest act of resolved consecration and heroic self-immolation that ever was done upon

earth—an act which we degrade by paralleling it with any other—was done at the bidding of the love that pitied us. As we look up at that cross we know not whether is more wonderfully set forth the pitying love of Christ's most tender heart, or the majestic energy of Christ's resolved will. The blended rays pour out, dear Brethren, and reach to each of us. Do not look to that great sacrifice with idle wonder. Bend upon it no eye of mere curiosity. Beware of theorizing merely about what it reveals and what it does. Turn not away from it carelessly as a twice told tale. But look, believing that all that Divine and Human Love pours out its treasure upon you, that all that firmness of resolved consecration and willing surrender to the death of the cross was for you. Look, believing that you had then, and have now, a place in His heart, and in His sacrifice. Look, remembering that it was because He would save you, that Himself He could not save.

And as, from afar, we look on that great sight, let His love melt our hearts to an answering fervour, and His fixed will give us, too, strength to delight in obedience, to set our faces like a flint. Let the power of His sacrifice, and the influence of His example which that sacrifice commends to our loving copy, and the grace of His Spirit whom He, since that sacrifice, pours upon men, so mould us that we, too, like Him, may "quit us like men, be strong," and all our strength and "all our deeds" be wielded and "done in charity."

SERMON XIV.

PARDON WITH PUNISHMENT.

PSALM xcix, 8.

Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.

WHEN the Prophet Isaiah saw his great vision of the King in his beauty, "sitting upon a throne, high, and lifted up," and his train filling the temple, he heard from the voices of the encompassing Seraphim the triple ascription of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

And this Psalm may be called the earthly echo of that celestial doxology. For, if you will notice, you will find that it is divided into three great sections, at the close of each of which it comes like a recurring thunder peal—"*for* it *is* holy;" "*for* He *is* holy;" "*for* the Lord our God *is* holy."

And these three sections, which thus celebrate the different sides of the Divine nature, and climb up to the one climactic thought—the holiness of God,—stand related to each other in a regular progress and sequence. The first of them magnifies His universal dominion, as

sitting between the Cherubim, and being high above all people, and calls for praise to the name which is great and terrible. The second of them hymns the praises of that dominion which is as just as it is strong, which establishes equity and gives ordinances and statutes to Jacob. And the third of them sets forth the close relation of love and fellowship and mutual converse which is possible between sinful men and this mighty God. "They call upon the Lord, and he answers them: he speaks to them in the cloudy pillar; they keep his testimonies." "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."

And on this loftiest of all the thoughts—that God talks with men and listens to them, that He gives them His mind and will, and strengthens them to keep it, that He smites them in order that they may be good, and pardons them even whilst He smites, there is piled a third call for praise: "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God *is* holy."

Two other remarks must be made by way of introduction. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, *though* thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." That implies that God's pardon and God's retribution are either really or apparently so far opposite—if I may so say—or at least unlike to each other, as to make it remarkable that they should be joined together. That is the ordinary notion of their mutual relations that people have. They think that God's pardon comes from His love, and God's penalties come from His judgment, and that the two never coincide and fall on the same

head, but that they have a double source, and a double object.

Now, a very great and grave mistake about the whole relations of forgiveness and retribution, and about the whole character of that Divine nature from which they both flow, is implied and concentrated, as it were, in that little word "though." It is no part of the original Psalm, and the rendering is a case of interpretation, rather than of translation. What the Psalm says is this: "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, *and* thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." If anybody choose to say that the vague Hebrew copula must necessarily stand here for "though," that is another thing. What the Psalm says is, Thou didst this *and* Thou didst that. The two are, as it were, in one length; they run into each other. They are continuous parts of one process. They both come from the same root. There is no apparent antagonism here even hinted at between pardon and retribution, forgiveness and punishment, but they are both regarded as parts of one great whole, and as flowing from the holy love of God, which the whole Psalm celebrates.

Then, one more observation will clear the ground sufficiently for what I have to say. Making this alteration, there still remains a word in the verse at which some people may stumble, "Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."

"Vengeance!" Well, it is scarcely worth while saying, and yet it may be as well to say, that the modern notion attached to revenge is by no means to be found in the word which is here employed. Our notion of vengeance

is harm, or loss, or pain of some sort inflicted at the bidding of private and passionate resentment and hate, in opposition to the calm and unhating course of public justice. We set up "the wild justice of revenge," as the phrase goes, against the course of sovereign and authoritative retribution and punitive action. But what the Old Testament meant by vengeance is precisely that public justice to which the modern notion of revenge is diametrically opposed. And what this verse says is, "Thou wast a God that didst forgive," and in the very act of forgiving, moved by no personal animosity, moved by no passionate resentment, but in the calm sovereign righteous process of that law, which is only the manifestation and the form of expression of Thine infinite love, didst at one and the same time forgive the man, and smite and punish him because of his evil.

The truths that lie in the whole are these: pardon and retribution are ever united; they spring from one source of holy love, and they ought to become to us the occasions of solemn and thankful praise. "Exalt the Lord our God . . . for He is Holy." Thou forgavest them, and didst punish their inventions.

These truths, of prime importance as they are, are but partially apprehended by many of us, and may well become the subject of a few remarks now. If we think of the connection of our text, as thus explained, it seems to involve these ideas—that forgiveness is essentially the unhindered communication of the Divine Love to sinful men; that being so, it necessarily involves the removal of the real penalty of Sin; that there are, however, other

consequences—punitive consequences of sin—which God loves us too well to remove when He pardons; and that these consequences, not removed by forgiveness, are so modified by it as to be turned into tokens of His loving discipline, to be received with thankfulness and celebrated with praise.

I. Notice, then, that *Forgiveness is, at bottom, the undisturbed communication of the Love of God to sinful men.*

We are far too apt to think that God pardons men in the fashion in which the sovereign pardons a culprit who has been sentenced to be hanged. Such pardon implies nothing as to the feelings of either the criminal or the monarch. There need neither be pity on the one side nor penitence on the other. Such inadequate notions of the Divine forgiveness arise, among other reasons, because so many of us have false notions of the true punishment of sin. People think that the worst consequences of a man's sin are some external consequences which can be done away by sovereignty, by the bare expression of a sovereign will; which need to be *inflicted*, and may therefore, be removed. The worst consequences of sin, as I shall presently have to show, do not need to be inflicted. They come automatically, by themselves, with the certainty of fate.

And still further, the true idea of forgiveness is to be found, not in the region of law only, but in the region of love and Fatherhood. The forgiveness of God is over and over again set forth in Scripture as being—*a father's* forgiveness. However we may illustrate it from the analogy of legal pardon, it is worth noticing that it is the

other analogy—the paternal one, which the Bible *expresses*. Indeed, I do not remember that we ever read of the pardon of our Judge or of our King, but we read "Your heavenly *Father* will forgive you your trespasses." And while I do not mean to say that the blessed assurance of remission of penalty is not in the idea, still it seems to me to be in harmony with these distinct statements to look deeper—even to the removal of all hindrances to the outflow of our Heavenly Father's love, and to the actual communication of that love, as being the very heart of His forgiveness of us.

"Our *father* forgives us." Let us keep fast by that. And then, let us remember our own childhood, our children, if we have any, and how we do with them. What makes the little face fall, and the tears come to the eyes? Is it your taking down the rod from behind the door, or the grave disapprobation in your face, and the trouble and rebuke in your eyes? It is not only the buffet from the father's hand that makes the punishment, but still more the disturbance and the displeasure of the father's heart that makes the child's punishment. And forgiveness is not complete when the father says, "Well, go away, I will not hurt you," but when he says, "Well, come, I am not angry with you, and I love you still." Not putting up the rod, but taking your child to your heart is your forgiveness. So long as the faintest trace of disturbance of the father's love by pain or disapprobation remains, so long as one fragment of the fault stands like the broken timbers of a dam to block the stream, so long the child is not pardoned. He is forgiven when the

last thin film of mist between him and his father has faded away. And the Heavenly Father seals His pardon to us when he declares, "I have blotted out, as a cloud, thy sins."

The blessing of forgiveness is not fully comprehended when it is thought of as shutting up some outward hell or the quenching of its flames. It goes much deeper than this, and means the untroubled communion of love and delight between the reconciled father and the repentant child.

Surely, though we do not take that Divine parable of the prodigal son as containing the whole statement of the method of forgiveness, we have a right to take it as containing the most pathetic and the truest statement of the contents of forgiveness. And what were these? It was something to have the fatted calf, and the shoes on the feet, and the rings on the finger, and the lighted house, and the music and the dancing; but the pardon had been passed and sealed long before that. "And when he came he had compassion on him, and fell on his neck and kissed him."

The slave may dread the rod, but the child dreads the father's closed heart. And pardon is the open heart of God, full of love, unaverted by any consequences of my sin, unclosed by any of my departure from Him. "Thou wilt cast all my sins behind thy back into the depths of the sea."

The same deep conception of the nature of forgiveness is implied in the other words of our Lord, where He makes our pardon of our fellows a condition of God's

pardon of us, and speaks of that human forgiveness, which is at once the shadow and the condition of the Divine, as being our forgiving of our brethren *from our hearts*—a phrase which plainly implies that it is an alteration of mind, not merely of conduct to the trespassing brother which He means. Pardon is but apparent unless the crime be swept out of our thoughts and hearts altogether—and no more suffered to influence either our deeds or our feelings. All true forgiveness forgets the guilt which it pardons. So, that wretched excuse for perennial malice which you often hear on people's lips, "I may forgive but I cannot forget," is a false distinction. The sin that is remembered is not forgiven. The sin that is pardoned is forgotten, and the forgetting is the ceasing to regard it as determining the relation between man and God. Notwithstanding the black barrier which we have flung across the stream by our sin, the pure and deep flood of the love of God shall rise and surge over the impediment, and fill our souls.

II. But still further, this being so, let me remind you that *Such pardon does necessarily sweep away the one true penalty of sin.* I have been maintaining that the proper notion of pardon is not the removal of penalty, and that is absolutely true if you think of penalty only as being external and arbitrarily inflicted. But it is not true when we come into the spiritual region.

You may say to me you have been talking about parental forgiveness, do not you remember that there is another class of metaphors by which God is set forth

in Scripture in His relations to man—that of king and sovereign?

Yes, I remember; and I am not going to reply—what I think people have no business to say, though it is a common statement nowadays—that the parental relation is deeper than the rectoral. I do not see that. I believe that the one and the other in the same sense are metaphors, and in the same sense are realities. We are not to go picking and choosing among the relations which God bears to men, and say one is more fundamental than the other. My Father is my King and my King is my Father, and I cannot see that we have any right to say—the one statement is a reality in a profounder fashion than the other. Both are the hallowing of earthly relations to the adumbration of the heavenly, which are still more real and sacred than the earthly.

Giving, then, full weight to the kinghood of our Heavenly Father as a reality, even as the fatherhood is, does that conflict with what we have been saying about pardon? Surely not. A king's forgiveness assuredly includes the remission of penalty; and God's forgiveness, because it is a Father's, includes the remission of penalty.

What is the penalty of sin? "The wages of sin is death." What is "death." The wrenching away of a dependent soul from God. How is that penalty ended? When the soul is united to God in the threefold bond of trust, love, and obedience. The communication of the love *is* the barring of the hell. And if

it were not for that wretched vulgarizing of all the ideas connected with the consequences of sin which sensual-bound natures are so prone to fall into, it would have been plain to men that the one true penalty of sin is to be torn asunder from God by our own evil desires, and that, therefore, the outflow of His love to us sinners is really the cancelling of the sorest penalty and true wages of unrighteousness. The two statements that forgiveness is the communication of the love of God unhindered by man's sin, and that forgiveness is the removal of the punishment of sin, are really but two ways of saying the same thing.

If we rightly understand what is the death of death, what is the consequence of transgression, how it comes, and in what sense it is that every man, by every sinful act, carries a coal to the hell-fire that may have to consume him; if we understand that the real misery and punishment is what the old Prophet proclaimed it to be —"Your sins have *separated* between you and your God," then we shall understand how the two representations coincide and flow together, and how the real penalty passes away where the love is welcomed and received.

III. Then there comes a third thought, viz., the one which is most prominently expressed in the text, that *the pardoning mercy of God leaves many penalties unremoved.*

"Thou forgavest them, and thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." Forgiveness and punishment both come from the same source, and generally go together. As I said at the beginning of these remarks, people fancy

that the fountain of living waters pours out "sweet waters and bitter." They are apt to think of that Divine mind as acting, like ours, from impulses which are each partial. They think that forgiveness comes from love, and from righteousness flows retribution and chastisement. It is not so. They are both parts of one process, they both come from one source, the one heart which is all holiness and all love.

And then, let me remind you of historical illustrations that may help to bring this idea out a little more clearly.

Remember the men of whom the Psalm speaks, "Moses and Aaron among his priests." Well, what about these men? Do you remember that both received penalties, chastisements. Each died because of his sin the one upon Hor and the other upon Pisgah. They were sent up there to die in the presence only of the stars, and in the silence, because they had transgressed against God. Thou forgavest them, and yet "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for he shall not enter into the land—because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah;" and to Moses he said, "Get thee up into this mountain—and die in the mount whither thou goest up, as Aaron thy brother died, because ye trespassed against me."

And remember the other instance—the classical instance—for this whole set of considerations: "Nathar came to David and said, Thou art the man. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because thou hast

given by this deed great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child shall surely die."

And thus, in historical instances, in the lives of the foremost men of old, who towered up like mountain peaks in the land of the Past,—the Psalmist sees the illustrations of his principle, and recognizes the great truth—"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." "Thou forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."

My friends, the old statement, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is absolutely true, universally true. The Gospel is not its abrogation. It modifies it, it gives it a new aspect; in some respects it gives it a new incidence; but be sure of this, that the harvest has to be gathered. For our worst sins there is plenteous redemption. My sin may become white as snow, and pass away altogether, in as far as it has power to disturb or sadden my relation to God. Yet our least sins leave in our lives, in our characters, in our memories, in our consciences, sometimes in our weakness, often in our worldly position, in our reputation, in our success, in our health, in a thousand other ways,—leave their traces and consequences. God will not put out His little finger to remove these, but lets them stop.

Let no man fancy, then, that the Gospel which proclaims forgiveness can be vulgarized into a mere proclamation of impunity. Not so. It was to *Christian* men that Paul said, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God loves us too well, not to punish His children when they

sin, and He loves us too well to annihilate, were it possible, the *secondary* consequences of our transgressions. The two sides of the one truth must both be recognized —that the deepest and, as we may call them, the *primary*, penalties of our evil, which are separation from God and the painful consciousness of guilt, are swept away; and, also, that other results are allowed to remain, which, being allowed, may be blessed and salutary for the transgressors.

If you waste your youth, no repentance will send the shadow back upon the dial, or recover the ground lost by idleness, or restore the constitution shattered by dissipation, or give again the resources wasted upon vice, or bring back the fleeting opportunities. If you forget God and live without Him in the world, fancying that it is time enough to become "religious" when you "have had your fling"—even were you to come back at last—and remember how few do—you could not obliterate the remembrance of misused years, nor the deep marks which they had left upon imagination and thought, and taste, and habit. The wounds can all be healed indeed; for the good Physician, blessed be His name, has lancets and bandages, and balm and anodynes for the deadliest, but scars remain even when the gash is closed.

There is an aspect in which it is true that the very greatness of the previous sin may become the occasion for the loftiest devotion and the lowliest trust in a pardoned man. The effects may be so modified as to contribute to the depth and power of his Christian character.

But even when the grace of God so modifies them, they remain. And though in some sense it be true that

Pardon is better than Innocence, the converse is true, that Innocence is better than Pardon. "I would have you simple concerning evil"—for even when forgiven, it leaves on character and memory many a trace of weakness, many a painful record.

IV. There is a final thought on which a word may be said, that *Pardoning Love so modifies the punishment that it becomes an occasion for solemn thankfulness.*

The outward act remaining the same, its whole aspect to us, the objects of it, is changed, when we think of it as flowing from the same love which pardons. The stroke has now ceased to be a mere natural result of our evil. We see that it is no sign of anger, but of love. Whatever painful consequences of past sin may still linger about our lives, or haunt our hearts, we may be sure of two things about them all—that they come *from* Forgiving Mercy, that they come *for* our profit. It is no rigid impersonal law which is smiting us, no mere natural evolution of results which blindly and impassively inflicts the pain. It is no harsh—no, nor even only a righteous Judge, who deals with us. We are not crushed between the insensate wheels of a dead machine, nor smitten by the blow of an inflexible fate, but we are chastened by a Father's hand, who loves us too well to do by us that which He forbids us to do by one another,—suffer sin upon our brother.

"When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned." The stroke of condemnation will never fall upon our pardoned hearts. That it may not, the loving strokes of His discipline must needs accompany the embrace of His forgiveness.

And so the pains change their character, and become things to be desired, to be humbly welcomed, to be patiently borne and used, and even to be woven into our hymns of praise. If we rightly understand whence they come, and what they intend, we shall see beneath the dark robes of these veiled messengers of His love, the bright apparel and the radiant faces of the angels of God sent to strengthen us. And even while we feel the smart of the scourge and the tingle of the rod, we shall "exalt the Lord our God," and set this on the summit of our thankful songs, "Thou art a God that forgivest us, and takest vengeance of our inventions."

Brethren, you know where and how the pardon is to be found. In Christ is all the Divine Forgiveness treasured. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." What He has borne for us, we have not to bear. His sufferings, His separation in His hour of great darkness from God, His death, have once and for ever absorbed the true penalty of a world's sins. Trust in Him, and there is no condemnation for you.

And remember that you have before you an alternative —*either* you will be separated from your sins by God's pardon in Christ and God's chastisement of love; *or*, clutching your sins, refusing to let Him cast them all away, you will be separated by them utterly from God, and so fall into the death which is the wages and real punishment of sin.

SERMON XV.

ETERNITY IN THE HEART.

Eccles. iii, 11.

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart.

THERE is considerable difficulty in understanding what precise meaning is to be attached to these words, and what precise bearing they have on the general course of the writer's thoughts; but one or two things are, at any rate, quite clear.

The Preacher has been enumerating all the various vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity, of construction and destruction, of society and solitude, of love and hate, for which there is scope and verge enough in one short human life; and his conclusion is, as it always is in the earlier part of this book, that because there is such an endless diversity of possible occupation, and each of them lasts but for a little time, and its opposite has as good a right of existence as itself; therefore, perhaps, it might be as well that a man should do nothing as do all these opposite things which neutralize each other, and the net result of which is nothing. If there be a time to be

born and a time to die, nonentity would be the same when all is over. If there be a time to plant and a time to pluck, what is the good of planting? If there be a time for love and a time for hate, why cherish affections which are transient and may be succeeded by their opposites?

And then another current of thought passes through his mind, and he gets another glimpse somewhat different, and says in effect, "No, that is not all true—God has made all these different changes, and although each of them seems contradictory of the other, in its own place and at its own time each is beautiful and has a right to exist." The contexture of life, and even the perplexities and darknesses of human society, and the varieties of earthly condition—if they be confined within their own proper limits, and regarded as parts of a whole—they are all co-operant to an end. As from wheels turning different ways in some great complicated machine, and yet fitting by their cogs into one another, there may be a resultant direct motion produced even by these apparently antagonistic forces.

But the second clause of our text adds a thought which is in some sense contrasted with this.

The word rendered world is a very frequent one in the Old Testament, and has never but one meaning, and that meaning is *eternity*. "He hath set *eternity* in their heart."

Here then are two antagonistic facts. There are transient things, a vicissitude which moves within natural limits, temporary events which are beautiful in their

season. But there is also the contrasted fact, that the man who is thus tossed about, as by some great battledore wielded by giant powers in mockery, from one changing thing to another, has relations to something more lasting than the transient. He lives in a world of fleeting change, but he has "eternity" in "his heart." So between him and his dwelling-place, between him and his occupations there is a gulf of disproportion. He is subjected to these alternations, and yet bears within him a repressed but immortal consciousness that he belongs to another order of things, which knows no vicissitude and fears no decay. He possesses stifled and misinterpreted longings which, however starved, do yet survive, after unchanging Being and eternal Rest. And thus endowed, and by contrast thus situated, his soul is full of the "blank misgiving of a creature moving about in worlds not realized." Out of these two facts—says our text—man's *where* and man's *what*, his nature and his position, there rises a mist of perplexity and darkness that wraps the whole course of the Divine actions—unless, indeed, we have reached that central height of vision above the mists, which this book of Ecclesiastes puts forth at last as the conclusion of the whole matter—"Fear God and keep his commandments." If transitory things with their multitudinous and successive waves toss us to solid safety on the Rock of Ages, then all is well, and many mysteries will be clear. But if not, if we have not found, or rather followed, the one God-given way of harmonizing these two sets of experiences—life in the Transient, and longings for the Eternal—then their antagonism darkens

our thoughts of a wise and loving Providence, and we have lost the key to the confused riddle which the world then presents. "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

Such, then, being a partial but, perhaps, not entirely inadequate view of the course of thought in the words before us, I may now proceed to expand the considerations thus brought under our notice in them. These may be gathered up in three principal ones—the consciousness of Eternity in every heart; the disproportion thence resulting between this nature of ours and the order of things in which we dwell; and, finally, the possible satisfying of that longing in men's hearts—a possibility not indeed referred to in our text, but unveiled as the final word of this book of Ecclesiastes, and made clear to *us* in Jesus Christ.

I. Consider that *Eternity set in every human heart.*

The expression is, of course, somewhat difficult, even if we accept generally the explanation which I have given. It may be either a declaration of the actual immortality of the soul, or it may mean, as I rather suppose it to do, the consciousness of eternity which is part of human nature.

The former idea is no doubt closely connected with the latter, and would here yield an appropriate sense. We should then have the contrast between man's undying existence and the transient trifles on which he is tempted to fix his love and hopes. We belong to one

set of existences by our bodies, and to another by our souls. Though we are parts of the passing material world, yet in that outward frame is lodged a personality that has nothing in common with decay and death. A spark of eternity dwells in these fleeting frames. The laws of physical growth and accretion and maturity and decay, which rule over all things material, do not apply to my true self. "In our embers is something that doth live." Whatsoever befalls the hairs that get grey and thin, and the hands that become wrinkled and palsied, and the heart that is worn out by much beating, and the blood that clogs and clots at last, and the filmy eye, and all the corruptible frame; yet, as the heathen said, "I shall not *all* die," but deep within this transient clay-house, that must crack and fall and be resolved into the elements out of which it was built up, there dwells an immortal guest, an undying personal self. In the heart, the inmost spiritual being of every man, Eternity, in this sense of the word, does dwell.

"Common-places," you say. Yes; common-places, which word means two things—truths that affect us all, and also truths which, because they are so universal and so entirely believed, are all but powerless. Surely it is not time to stop preaching such truths as long as they are forgotten by the overwhelming majority of the people who acknowledge them. Thank God, the staple of the work of us preachers is the reiteration of common-places, which His goodness has made familiar, and our indolence and sin have made stale and powerless.

My brother, you would be a wiser man if instead of

turning the edge of statements which you know to be true, and which, if true, are infinitely solemn and important, by commonplace sarcasm about pulpit commonplaces, you would honestly try to drive the familiar neglected truth home to your mind and heart. Strip it of its generality and think—it is true about *me*. *I* live for ever. My outward life will cease, and *my* dust will return to dust—but *I* shall last undying. And ask yourselves—what then? Am I making "provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," in more or less refined fashion, and forgetting to provide for that which lives for evermore? Eternity is in *my* heart. What a madness it is to go on, as if either I were to continue for ever among the shows of time, or when I leave them all, to die wholly and be done with altogether!

But, probably, the other interpretation of these words is the truer. The doctrine of immortality does not seem to be stated in this book of Ecclesiastes, except in one or two very doubtful expressions. And it is more in accordance with its whole tone to suppose the preacher here to be asserting, not that the heart or spirit is immortal, but that, whether it is or no, in the heart is planted the *thought*, the *consciousness* of eternity—and the longing after it.

Let me put that into other words. We, brethren, are the only beings on this earth, who can think the thought, and speak the word—eternity. Other creatures are happy while immersed in time; we have another nature, and are disturbed by a thought which shines high above the roaring sea of circumstance in which we float.

I do not care at present about the metaphysical puzzles that have been gathered round that conception, nor care to ask whether it is positive or negative, adequate or inadequate. Enough that the word has *a* meaning, that it corresponds to a thought which dwells in men's minds. It is of no consequence at all for our purpose, whether it is a positive conception, or simply the thinking away of all limitations. "I know what God is, when you do not ask me." I know what eternity is, though I cannot define the word to satisfy a metaphysician. The little child taught by some grandmother Lois, in a cottage, knows what she means when she tells him "you will live for ever," though both scholar and teacher would be puzzled to put it into other words. When we say Eternity flows round this bank and shoal of time, men know what we mean. Heart answers to heart; and in each heart lies that solemn thought—for ever!

Like all other of the primal thoughts of men's souls, it may be increased in force and clearness, or it may be neglected and opposed, and all but crushed. The thought of God is natural to men, the thought of right and wrong is natural to man—and yet there may be atheists who have blinded their eyes, and there may be degraded and almost animal natures who have seared their consciences and call sweet bitter and evil good. Thus men may so plunge themselves into the present as to lose the consciousness of the Eternal—as a man swept over Niagara, blinded by the spray, and deafened by the rush, would see or hear nothing outside the green walls

of the death that encompassed him. And yet the blue sky with its peaceful spaces stretches above the hell of waters!

So the thought is in us all—a presentiment and a consciousness: and that universal presentiment itself goes far to establish the reality of the unseen order of things to which it is directed. The great planet that moves on the outmost circle of our system was discovered because that next it wavered in its course in a fashion which was inexplicable, unless some unknown mass was attracting it from across millions of miles of darkling space. And there are "perturbations" in our spirits which cannot be understood, unless from them we may divine that far off and unseen world, that has power from afar to sway in their orbits the little lives of mortal men. It draws us to itself—but, alas, the attraction may be resisted and thwarted. The dead mass of the planet bends to the drawing, but we can repel the constraint which the eternal world would exercise upon us—and so that consciousness which ought to be our nobleness, as it is our prerogative, may become our shame, our misery, and our sin.

That Eternity which is set in our hearts is not merely the thought of ever-during Being, or of an everlasting order of things to which we are in some way related. But there are connected with it other ideas besides those of mere duration. Men know what perfection means. They understand the meaning of perfect goodness; they have the notion of infinite wisdom and boundless Love. These thoughts are the material of all poetry, the thread

from which the Imagination creates all her wondrous tapestries. This "capacity for the Infinite," as people call it—which is only a fine way of putting the same thought as that in our text—which is the prerogative of human spirits, is likewise the curse of many spirits. By their misuse of it they make it a fatal gift, and turn it into an unsatisfied desire which gnaws their souls, a famished yearning which "roars, and suffers hunger." Knowing what perfection is, they turn to limited natures and created hearts for their rest. Having the haunting thought of an absolute goodness, a perfect wisdom, an endless Love, an eternal life—they try to find the being that corresponds to their thought here on earth, and so they are plagued with endless disappointment.

My brother, God has put eternity in *your* heart. Not only will you live for ever, but also in your present life you have a consciousness of that eternal and infinite and all-sufficient Being that lives above. You have need of Him, and, whether you know it or not, the tendrils of your spirits, like some climbing plant, not fostered by a careful hand but growing wild, are feeling out into the vacancy in order to grasp the stay which they need for their fruitage and their strength.

By the make of our spirits, by the possibilities that dawn dim before us, by the thoughts "whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality," —by all these and a thousand other signs and facts in every human life we say, "God has set eternity in their hearts!"

II. And then turn to the second idea that is here.

The disproportion between this our nature, and the world in which we dwell.

The writer of this book (whether Solomon or no we need not stay to discuss) looks out upon the world; and, in accordance with the prevailing tone of all the earlier parts of his contemplations, finds in this prerogative of man but another reason for saying, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Two facts meet him antagonistic to one another, the place that man occupies and the nature that man bears. This creature with eternity in his heart where is he set? what has he got to work upon? what has he to love and hold by, to trust to, and anchor his life on? A crowd of things, each well enough, but each having a *time*—and though they be beautiful in their time, yet fading and vanishing when it has elapsed. No multiplication of *times* will make *eternity*. And so with that thought in his heart, man is driven out among objects perfectly insufficient to meet it.

Christ said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head"—and while the words have their proper and most pathetic meaning, in the history of His own earthly life of travail and toil for our sakes, we may also venture to give them the further application, that all the lower creatures are at rest here, and that the more truly a man is man, the less can he find, among all the shadows of the present, a pillow for his head, a place of repose for his heart. The animal nature is at home in the material world, the human nature is not.

Every other creature presents the most accurate correspondence between nature and circumstances, powers and occupations. Man alone is like some poor land-bird blown out to sea, and floating half-drowned with clinging plumage on an ocean where the dove "finds no rest for the sole of her foot," or like some creature that loves to glance in the sunlight, but is plunged into the deepest recesses of a dark mine. In the midst of a universe marked by the nicest adaptations of creatures to their habitation, man alone, the head of them all, presents the unheard-of anomaly that he is surrounded by conditions which do *not* fit his whole nature, which are not adequate for all his powers, on which he cannot feed and nurture his whole being. "To what purpose is this waste?" "Hast thou made all men in vain?"

Everything is "beautiful in its time." Yes, and for that very reason, as this book of Ecclesiastes says in another verse, "Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him." It was happy when we loved; but the day of indifference and alienation and separation comes. Our spirits were glad when we were planting; but the time for plucking up that which was planted is sure to draw near. It was blessed to pour out our souls in the effluence of love, or in the fulness of thought, and the time to speak was joyous; but the dark day of silence comes on. When we twined hearts and clasped hands together it was glad, and the time when we embraced was blessed; but the time to refrain from embracing is as sure to draw near. It is good for the eyes to behold

the sun, but so certainly as it rolls to its bed in the west, and "leaves the world to darkness" and to us, do all earthly occupations wane and fade, and all possessions shrivel and dwindle, and all associations snap and drop and end, and the whirligig of time works round and takes away everything which it once brought us.

And so, man with eternity in his heart, with the hunger in his spirit after an unchanging whole, an absolute good, an ideal perfectness, an immortal being—is condemned to the tread-mill of transitory revolution. Nothing continueth in one stay, "For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." It is limited, it is changeful, it slips from under us as we stand upon it, and, therefore, mystery and perplexity stoop down upon the providence of God, and misery and loneliness enter into the heart of man. These changeful things, they do not meet our ideal, they do not satisfy our wants, they do not last even our duration.

"The misery of the man is great upon him," said the text quoted a moment ago. And is it not? Is this present life enough for you? Sometimes you fancy it is. Many of us habitually act on the understanding that it is, and treat all that I have been saying about the dispro portion between our nature and our circumstances as not true about them. "This world not enough for me!" you say—"yes! it is; only let me get a little more of it, and keep what I get, and I shall be all right." So then —"a little more" is wanted, is it? And that "little more"

will always be wanted, and besides it, the guarantee of permanence will always be wanted, and failing these, there will ever be a hunger that nothing can fill which belongs to earth. Do you remember the bitter experience of the poor prodigal, "he *would fain* have filled his belly with the husks?" He tried his best to live upon the horny mouthfuls pods, but he could not: and after them, he still was "perishing with hunger." So it is with us all when we try to fill the soul and satisfy the spirit with earth or aught that holds of it. It is as impossible to still the hunger of the heart with that, as to stay the hunger of the body with wise sayings or noble sentiments.

I appeal to your real selves, to your own past experience. Is it not true that, deep below the surface contentment with the world and the things of the world, a dormant, but lightly slumbering sense of want and unsatisfied need lies in your souls? Is it not true that it wakes sometimes at a touch; that the tender dying light of sunset, or the calm abysses of the mighty heavens, or some strain of music, or a line in a book, or a sorrow in your heart, or the solemnity of a great joy, or close contact with sickness and death, or the more direct appeals of Scripture and of Christ, stir a wistful yearning and a painful sense of emptiness in your hearts, and of insufficiency in all the ordinary pursuits of your lives? It cannot but be so: for though it be true that our natures are in some measures subdued to what we work in, and although it is possible to atrophy the deepest parts of our being by long neglect or starvation, yet you will

never do that so thoroughly but that the deep-seated longing will break forth at intervals, and the cry of its hunger echo through the soul. Many of us do our best to silence it. But I, for my part, believe, that however you have crushed and hardened your souls by indifference, by ambition, by worldly cares, by frivolous or coarse pleasures, or by any of the thousand other ways in which you can do it—yet, there is some response in your truest self to my poor words when I declare that a soul without God is an empty and an aching soul!

These things which, even in their time of beauty, are not enough for a man's soul—have all but a time to be beautiful in, and then they fade and die. A great botanist made what he called "a floral clock" to mark the hours of the day by the opening and closing of flowers. It was a graceful and yet a pathetic thought. One after another they spread their petals, and their varying colours glow in the light. But one after another they wearily shut their cups, and the night falls, and the latest of them folds itself together, and all are hidden away in the dark. So our joys and treasures, were they sufficient did they last, cannot last. After a summer's day comes a summer's night, and after a brief space of them comes winter, when all are killed and the leafless trees stand silent,

> "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

We cleave to these temporal possessions and joys, and the natural law of change sweeps them away from us one by one. Most of them do not last so long as

we do, and they pain us when *they* pass away from us. Some of them last longer than we do, and *they* pain us when we pass away from them. Either way our hold of them is a transient hold, and one knows not whether is the sadder—the bare garden beds where all have done blowing, and nothing remains but a tangle of decay, or the blooming beauty from which a man is summoned away, leaving others to reap what he has sown. Tragic enough are both at the best—and certain to befall us all. We live and they fade; we die and they remain. We live again and they are far away. The facts are *so*. We may make them a joy or a sorrow as we will. Transiency is stamped on all our possessions, occupations, and delights. We have the hunger for eternity in our souls, the thought of eternity in our hearts, the destination for eternity written on our inmost being, and the need to ally ourselves with eternity proclaimed even by the most short-lived trifles of time. Either these things will be the blessing or the curse of our lives. Which do you mean that they shall be for you?

III. These thoughts lead us to consider *The possible Satisfying of our Souls.*

This book of Ecclesiastes is rather meant to enforce the truth of the weariness and emptiness of a godless life, than of the blessedness of a godly one. It is the record of the struggles of a soul—"the confessions of an inquiring spirit"—feeling and fighting its way through many errors, and many partial and unsatisfactory solutions of the great problem of life, till he reaches the one in which he can rest. When he has touched that

goal his work is done. And so the devious way is told in the book at full length, while a sentence sets forth the conclusion to which he was working, even when he was most bewildered. "The conclusion of the whole matter" is "Fear God and keep his commandments." That is all that a man needs. It is "the whole of man." "All is" *not* "vanity and vexation of spirit" *then*—but "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The preacher in his day learned that it was possible to satisfy the hunger for eternity, which had once seemed to him a questionable blessing. He learned that it was a loving Providence which had made man's home so little fit for him, that he might seek the "city which hath foundations." He learned that all the pain of passing beauty, and the fading flowers of man's goodliness were capable of being turned into a solemn joy. Standing at the centre, he saw order instead of chaos, and when he had come back, after all his search, to the old simple faith of peasants and children in Judah, to fear God and keep His commandments, he understood why God had set eternity in man's heart, and then flung him out, as if in mockery, amidst the stormy waves of the changeful ocean of time

And we, who have a further word from God, may have a fuller and yet more blessed conviction, built upon our own happy experience, if we choose, that it *is* possible for us to have that deep thirst slaked, that longing appeased. We have Christ to trust to and to love. He has given Himself for us that all our many sins against

the Eternal Love and our guilty squandering of our hearts upon transitory treasures may be forgiven. He has come amongst us, the Word in human flesh, that our poor eyes may see the Eternal walking amidst the things of time and sense, and may discern a beauty in Him beyond whatsoever things are lovely. He has come that we through Him may lay hold on God, even as in Him God lays hold on us. As in mysterious and transcendent union the Divine takes into itself the human in that person of Jesus, and Eternity is blended with Time; we, trusting Him and yielding our hearts to Him, receive into our poor lives an incorruptible seed, and for us the soul-satisfying realities that abide for ever mingle with and are reached through the shadows that pass away.

Brethren, yield yourselves to Him! In conscious unworthiness, in lowly penitence, let us cast ourselves on Jesus Christ, our sacrifice, for pardon and peace! Trust Him and love Him! Live by Him and for Him! And then, the loftiest thoughts of our hearts, as they seek after absolute perfection and changeless love, shall be more than fulfilled in Him who is more than all that man ever dreamed, because He is the perfection of man, and the Son of God.

Love Christ and live in Him, taking Him for the motive, the spring, and the very atmosphere of your lives, and then no capacities will languish for lack of either stimulus or field, and no weariness will come over you, as if you were a stranger from your home. For if Christ be near us, all things go well with us. If we live for Him, the power of that motive will make all our nature

blossom like the vernal woods, and dry branches break into leafage. If we dwell in Him, we shall be at home wherever we are, like the patriarch who pitched his tent in many lands, but always had the same tent wherever he went. So we shall have the one abode, though its place in the desert may vary—and we shall not need to care whether the encampment be beneath the palm trees and beside the wells of Elim, or amidst the drought of Mara, so long as the same covering protects us, and the same pillar of fire burns above us.

Love Christ, and then the eternity in the heart will not be a great aching void, but will be filled with the everlasting life which Christ gives, and is. The vicissitude will really become the source of freshness and progress which God meant it to be. Everything which, when made our all-sufficient portion becomes stale and unprofitable, even in its time, will be apparelled in celestial light. It shall all be lovely and pleasant while it lasts, and its beauty will not be saddened by the certainty of its decay, nor its empty place a pain when it has passed away.

Take Christ for Saviour and friend, your guide and support through time, and Himself your Eternity of Joy, then all discords are reconciled—and "all things are yours—whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

SERMON XVI.

MAN'S BLESSEDNESS AND GOD'S PRAISE.

PSALM i, 1, 2.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord.

PSALM cl, 6.

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

THE Psalter is the echo in devout hearts of the other portions of Divine revelation. There are in it, indeed, further disclosures of God's mind and purposes, but its especial characteristic is—the reflection of the light of God from brightened faces and believing hearts.

As we hold it to be inspired, we cannot simply say that it is man's response to God's voice. But if the rest of Scripture may be called the speech of the Spirit of God *to* men, this book is the answer of the Spirit of God *in* men.

These two verses which I venture to lay side by side present in a very remarkable way this characteristic. It is not by accident that they stand where they do, the first

and last verses of the whole collection, inclosing all, as it were, within a golden ring, and bending round to meet each other. They are the summing up of the whole purpose and issue of God's revelation to men.

The first and second Psalms are, obviously, intended as a kind of double introduction to the whole Psalter. We might call them the frontispiece and vignette to the book. They echo the two main portions of the old revelation—the Law and the Prophets. The first of them is taken up with the celebration of the blessedness and fruitful, stable being of the man who loves the Law of the Lord, as contrasted with the rootless and barren life of the ungodly, who is like the chaff. The second is occupied with the contemplation of the Divine "decree" by which the coming king is set in God's "holy hill of Zion," and of the blessedness of "all they who put their trust in him," as contrasted with the swift destruction that shall fall on the vain imaginations of the rebellious heathen and banded kings of earth.

The words of our first text, then, may well stand at the beginning of the Psalter. They express the great purpose for which God has given His law. They are the witness of human experience to the substantial, though partial, accomplishment of that purpose. They rise in buoyant triumph over that which is painful and apparently opposed to it; and in spite of sorrow and sin, proclaim the blessedness of the life which is rooted in the Law of the Lord.

The last words of the book are as significant as its first. The closing Psalms are one long call to praise—

they probably date from the time of the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah, when, as we know, "the service of song" was carefully re-established, and the harps which had hung silent upon the willows by the rivers of Babylon woke again their ancient melodies. These Psalms climb higher and higher in their rapturous call to all creatures, animate and inanimate, on earth and in heaven, to praise Him. The golden waves of music and song pour out ever faster and fuller. At last we hear this invocation to every instrument of music to praise Him, responded to, as we may suppose, by each in turn as summoned adding its tributary notes to the broadening river of harmony—until all, with gathered might of glad sound blended with the crash of many voices, unite in the final words, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

I. We have here *a twofold declaration of God's great purpose* in all His self-revelation, and especially in the Gospel of His Son.

Our first text may be translated as a joyful exclamation, "Oh! the blessedness of the man—whose delight is in the law of the Lord." Our second is an invocation or a command. The one then expresses the purpose which God secures by his gift of the Law; the other the purpose which he summons us to fulfil by the tribute of our hearts and songs—man's happiness and God's glory.

His purpose is Man's Blessedness.

That is but another way of saying, God is love. For love, as we know it, is eminently the desire for the happiness of the person on whom it is fixed. And

unless the love of God be like ours, however it may transcend it, there is no revelation of Him to our hearts at all. If He be love, then He "delights in the prosperity" of His children.

And that purpose runs through all His acts. For perfect love is all-pervasive, and even with us men, it rules the whole being; nor does he love at all who seeks for the welfare of the heart he clings to by fits and starts, by some of his acts and not by others. When God comes forth from the unvisioned light—which is thick darkness—of His own Eternal, self-adequate Being, and flashes into energy in creation, providence, or grace, the Law of His Working and His Purpose are one, in all regions. The unity of the Divine acts depends on this—that all flow from one deep source, and all move to one mighty end. Standing on the height to which His own declarations of His own nature lifts our feebleness, we can see how the "river of God that waters the garden" and "parts" into many "heads," gushes from one fountain. One of these Psalms puts what people call the "philosophy" of creation and of providence very clearly in accordance with this thought—that the Love of God is the source, and the blessedness of man the end of all His work. "To him that made great lights; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that slew mighty kings; for his mercy endureth for ever."

Creation, then, is the effluence of the loving heart of God. Though the sacred characters be but partially legible to us now, what He wrote, on stars and flowers, on the infinitely great and the infinitely small, on the

infinitely near and the infinitely far off, with His creating hand, was the one inscription—God is love. And as in nature, so in providence. The origination, and the support, and the direction of all things, are the works and the heralds of the same love. It is printed in starry letters on the sky. It is graven on the rocks, and breathed by the flowers. It is spoken as a dark saying even by sorrow and pain. The mysteries of destructive and crushing providences have come from the same source. And he who can see with the Psalmist the ever-during mercy of the Lord, as the reason of creation and of judgments, has in his hands the golden key which opens all the locks in the palace chambers of the great King. He only hath penetrated to the secret of things material, and stands in the light at the centre, who understands that all comes from the one source—God's endless desire for the blessedness of His creatures!

But while all God's works do thus praise Him by testifying that He seeks to bless His creatures, the loftiest example of that desire is, of course, found in His revelation of Himself to men's hearts and consciences, to men's spirit and wills. That mightiest act of love, beginning in the long past generations, has culminated in Him in whom dwelleth the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in whose work is all the love—the perfect, inconceivable, patient, omnipotent love of our redeeming God.

And then, remember that this is not inconsistent with or contradicted by the sterner aspects of that revelation, which cannot be denied, and ought not to be minimized or softened. *There*, on the right hand, are the flowery

slopes of the mount of Blessing; *there*, on the left, the barren, stern, thunder-riven, lightning-splintered pinnacles of the mount of Cursing. Every clear note of benediction hath its low minor of imprecation from the other side. Between the two, overhung by the hopes of the one, and frowned upon and dominated by the threatenings of the other, is pitched the little camp of our human life, and the path of our pilgrimage runs in the trough of the valley between. And yet—might I not go a step farther, and say that above the parted summits stretches the one over-arching blue, uniting them both, and their roots deep down below the surface interlace and twine together? That is to say, the threatenings and rebukes, the acts of retributive judgment, which are contained in the revelation of God, are no limitation nor disturbance of the clear and happy faith that all which we behold is full of blessing, and that all comes from the Father's hand. They are the garb in which the Love needs to array itself when it comes in contact with man's sin and man's evil. The love of God appears no less when it teaches us in grave sad tones that "the wages of sin is death," than when it proclaims that "the gift of God is eternal life."

Love threatens that it may never have to execute its threats. Love warns that we may be wise in time. Love prophesies that its sad forebodings may not be fulfilled. And love smites with lighter strokes of premonitory chastisements, that we may never need or feel "the whips of scorpions."

Remember, too, that these sterner aspects both of Law and of Gospel point this lesson—that we shall very much

misunderstand God's purpose if we suppose it to be—blessedness for us men *anyhow*, irrespective altogether of character. Some people seem to think that God loves us so much, they would say—so little, so ignobly, I would say—as that He only desires us to be happy. They seem to think that the Divine love is tarnished unless it provides for men's felicity, whether they are God-loving and God-like or no. Thus the solemn and majestic love of the Father in heaven is to be brought down to a weak good nature, which only desires that the child shall cease crying and be happy, and does not mind by what that end is reached. God's purpose *is* blessedness; but, as this very text tells us, not blessedness anyhow, but one which will not and cannot be given by God to those who walk in the way of sinners. His love desires that we should be holy, and followers of God as dear children—and the blessedness which it bestows comes from pardon and growing fellowship with Him. It can no more fall on rebellious hearts than the pure crystals of the snow can lie and sparkle on the hot black cone of a volcano.

The other text that I have read sets forth another view of God's purpose. *God seeks our praise.* "The glory of God is the end of all the Divine actions. Now, that is a statement which no doubt is irrefragable, and a plain deduction from the very conception of an infinite Being. But it may be held in such connections, and spoken with such erroneous application, and so divorced from other truths, that instead of being what it is in the Bible—good news, it shall become a curse and a lie. It may not be understood as to describe not our Father in heaven, but

an almighty devil! But, when the thought that God's purpose in all His acts is His own glory, is firmly united with that other, that His purpose in all His acts is our blessing, then we begin to understand how full of joy it may be for us. His glory is sought by Him in the manifestation of His loving heart, mirrored in our illuminated and gladdened hearts. Such a glory is not unworthy of infinite love. It has nothing in common with the ambitious and hungry greed of men for reputation or self-display. That desire is altogether ignoble and selfish when it is found in human hearts; and it would be none the less ignoble and selfish if it were magnified into infinitude, and transferred to the Divine. But to say that God's glory is His great end is surely but another way of saying that He is love. The love that seeks to bless us desires, as all love does, that it should be known for what it is, that it should be recognized in our glad hearts, and smiled back again from our brightened faces. God desires that we should know Him, and so have Eternal Life; He desires that knowing Him, we should love Him, and loving should praise, and so should glorify Him. He desires that there should be an interchange of love bestowing and love receiving, of gifts showered down, of praise ascending, of fire falling from the heavens, and sweet incense, from grateful hearts, going up in fragrant clouds acceptable unto God. It is a sign of a Fatherly heart that He "*seeketh* such to worship Him." He will be glorified by our praise, because He loves us so much. He commences with an offer, He advances to a command. He gives first, and then (not till then) He comes seeking

fruit of the "trees" which are "the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." His plea is not, "the vineyard belongs to me, and I have a right to its fruits," but "what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?—judge between me and my vineyard." First, he showers down blessings; then, looks for the revenue of praise!

II. We may also take these passages as giving us *a twofold expression of the actual effects* of God's revelation, especially in the Gospel, even here upon earth.

The one text is the joyful exclamation built upon experience and observation. The other is a call which is answered in some measure even by voices that are often dumb in unthankfulness, often broken by sobs, often murmuring in penitence.

God does *actually*, though not completely, *make men blessed here*. Our text sums up the experience of all the devout hearts and lives whose emotions are expressed in the Psalms. He who wrote this Psalm would preface the whole by words into which the spirit of the book is distilled. It will have much to say of sorrow and pain. It will touch many a low note of wailing and of grief. There will be complaints and penitence, and sighs almost of despair before it closes. But this which he puts first is the key-note of the whole. So it is in our histories. They will run through many a dark and desert place. We shall have bitterness and trials in abundance, there will be many an hour of sadness caused by my own evil, and many a hard struggle with it. But high above all these mists and clouds will rise the hope that seeks the skies,

and deep beneath all the surface agitations of storms and currents there will be the unmoved stillness of the central ocean of peace in our hearts. In the "valley of weeping" we may still be "blessed" if "the ways" are in our hearts, and if we make of the very tears "a well," drawing refreshment from the very trials. With all its sorrows and pains, its fightings and fears, its tribulations in the world, and its chastenings from a father's hand, the life of a Christian is a happy life, and the Joy of the Lord remains with His Servants.

More than twenty centuries have passed since that Psalm was written. As many stretched dim behind the Psalmist as he sang. He was gathering up in one sentence the spirit of the past, and confirming it by his own life's history. And has any one that has lived since then stood up and said—"Behold! I have found it otherwise. I have waited on God, and He has not heard my cry. I have served Him, and that for nought. I have trusted in Him, and been disappointed. I have sought His face—in vain. And I say, from my own experience, that the man who trusts in Him is *not* blessed?" Not one, thank God! The history of the past, so far as this matter is concerned, may be put in one sentence, "They looked unto him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." And as for the present, are there not some of us who can say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

Brethren, make the experiment for yourselves. Test this experience by your own simple affiance and living trust in Jesus Christ. We have the experience of all

generations to encourage us. What has blessed them is enough for you and me. Like the meal and the oil, which were the Prophet's resource in famine, yesterday's supply does not diminish to-morrow's store. We, too, may have all that gladdened the hearts and stayed the spirits of the saints of old. "O! taste and see that God is good." "Blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

So, too, God's gift *produces man's praise.*

What is it that he desires from us? Nothing but our thankful recognition and reception of His benefit. We honour God by taking the full cup of salvation which He commends to our lips, and by calling, while we drink, upon the name of the Lord. Our true response to His Word, which is essentially a proffer of blessing to us, is to open our hearts to receive, and, receiving, to render grateful acknowledgment. The echo of love which gives and forgives, is love which accepts and thanks. We have but to lift up our empty and impure hands, opened wide to receive the gift which He lays in them—and though they be empty and impure, yet "the lifting up of our hands is as the evening sacrifice;" our sense of need stands in the place of all offerings. The stained thankfulness of our poor hearts is accepted by Him who inhabiteth the praises of Eternity, and yet delights in the praises of Israel. He bends from Heaven to give, and all He asks is that we should take. He only seeks our thankfulness—but He does seek it. And wherever His grace is discerned, and His love is welcomed, there praise breaks forth, as surely as streams pour from the cave of

the glacier when the sun of summer melts it, or earth answers the touch of spring with flowers.

And that effect is produced, notwithstanding all the complaints and sighs and tears which sometimes choke our praise. It *is* produced even while these last—the psalms of thanksgiving are not all reserved for the end of the book. But even in those which read like the very sobs of a broken heart, there is ever present some tone of grateful acknowledgment of God's mercy. He sends us sorrow, and He wills that we should weep—but they should be tears like David's, who, at the lowest point of his fortunes, when he plaintively besought God, "Put thou my tears into thy bottle"—could say in the same breath, "Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee." God works on our souls that we may have the consciousness of sin, and He wills that we should come with broken and contrite hearts, and like the king of Israel wail out our confessions and supplications—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness." But, like him, we should even in our lowliest abasement, when our hearts are bruised, be able to say along with our contrition, "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." Our sorrows are never so great that they hide our mercies. The sky is never covered with clouds so that neither sun nor stars appear for many days. And in every Christian heart the low tones of lamentation and confession are blended with grateful praise. So it is even in the darkest moments, whilst the blast of misfortune and misery is as a storm against the wall.

But a brighter hope even for our life here rises from these words, if we think of the place which they hold in the whole book. They are the last words. Whatever other notes have been sounded in its course, all ends in this. The winter's day has had its melancholy grey sky, with many a bitter dash of snow and rain—but it has stormed itself out, and at eventide, a rent in the clouds reveals the sun, and it closes in peaceful clearness of light.

The note of gladness heard at the beginning, "Oh, the blessedness of the man that delights in the law of the Lord," holds on persistently, like a subdued and almost bewildered under-current of sweet sound amid all the movements of some colossal symphony, through tears and sobs, confession and complaint, and it springs up at the close triumphant, like the ruddy spires of a flame long smothered, and swells and broadens, and draws all the intricate harmonies into its own rushing tide. Some of you remember the great work which has these very words for its theme. It begins with the call, "All that hath life and breath, praise ye the Lord"—and although the gladness saddens into the plaintive cry of a soul sick with hope deferred, "will the night soon pass?" yet, ere the close, all discords are reconciled, and at last, with assurance firmer for the experience of passing sorrows, loud as the voice of many waters and sweet as harpers harping with their harps, the joyful invocation peals forth again, and all ends, as it does in a Christian man's life, and as it does in this book, with "Praise ye the Lord."

III. We have here also *a twofold prophecy of the perfection of Heaven.*

Whilst it is true that both of these purposes are accomplished here and now, it is also true that their accomplishment is but partial, and that therefore for their fulfilment we have to lift our eyes beyond this world of imperfect faith, of incomplete blessedness, of interrupted praise. Whether the Psalmist looked forward thus we do not know. But for us, the very shortcomings of our joy and of our songs are prophetic of the perfect and perpetual rapture of the one, and the perfect and perpetual music of the other. We know that He who has given us so much will not stay His hand until He has perfected that which concerns us. We know that He who has taught our dumb hearts to magnify His name will not cease till "out of the lips of babes and sucklings He has perfected praise." We know that the pilgrims in whose hearts are the ways are blessed. We are sure that a fuller blessedness must belong to those who have reached the journey's end.

And so these words give us a twofold aspect of that future on which our longing hopes may well fix.

It is the perfection of Man's Blessedness. Then the joyous exclamation of our first text, which we have often had to strive hard not to disbelieve, will be no more a truth of faith but a truth of experience. Here we have had to trust that it was so, even when we could scarce cleave to the confidence. There, memory will look back on our wanderings through this great wilderness, and, enlightened by the issue of them all, will speak only of

Mercy and Goodness as our angel guides all our lives. The end will crown the work. Pure unmingled consciousness of bliss will fill all hearts, and break into the old exclamation, which we had sometimes to stifle sobs ere we could speak on earth. When He says, "Come in, ye blessed of my Father," all our tears and fears, and pains and sins will be forgotten, and we shall but have to say, in wonder and joy, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee."

It is the perfection of God's praise. We may possibly venture to see in these wonderful words of our text a dim and far-off hint of a possibility that seems to be pointed at in many parts of Scripture—that the blessings of Christ's mighty work shall, in some measure and manner, pass through man to his dwelling-place and its creatures. Dark shadows of evil—the mystery of pain and sorrow—lie over earth and all its tribes. "We look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." And the statements of Scripture which represent creation as suffering by man's sin, and participant in its degree in man's redemption, seem too emphatic and precise, as well as too frequent, and in too didactic connections, to be rightly brushed aside as poetic imagery. May it not be that man's transgression

> "Broke the fair music that all creatures made
> To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed,"

and that man's restoration may, indeed, bring back all that hath life and breath to a harmonious blessedness—according to the deep and enigmatical words, which declare that "the creature itself also shall be delivered

from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God?"

Be that as it may, at all events our second text opens to us the gates of the heavenly temple, and shows us there the saintly ranks and angel companies gathered in the city whose walls are salvation and its gates praise.

They harmonize with that other later vision of heaven which the Seer in Patmos beheld, not only in setting before us worship as the glad work of all who are there, but in teaching the connection between the praises of men, and the answering hymns of angels. The harps of heaven are hushed to hear *their* praise who can sing, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." And, in answer to that hymn of thanksgiving for unexampled deliverance and restoring grace, the angels around the throne break forth into new songs to the Lamb that was slain—while still wider spread the broadening circles of harmonious praise, till at last "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them," join in the mighty hymn of "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever." Then the rapturous exclamation from human souls redeemed,—"Oh the blessedness of the men whom thou hast loved and saved," shall be answered by choral praise from "everything that hath breath."

And are you dumb, my friend, in these universal bursts of praise? Is that because you have not chosen to take the universal blessing which God gives? You have

nothing to do but to receive the things that are freely given to you of God—the forgiveness, the cleansing, the life that come from Christ by faith. Take them, and call upon the name of the Lord. And can you refuse His gifts and withhold your praise? You can be eloquent in thanks to those who do you kindnesses, and in praise of those whom you admire and love. But your best friend receives none of your gratitude and none of your praise. Dull ignoble silence, and dull unthankfulness—with these you requite your Saviour! "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

SERMON XVII.

PRIDE OVERCOMING WANT.

2 KINGS v, 11.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

WE are justified, by the whole tenor of the Mosaic law as to leprosy, in regarding that frightful disease as a parable and symbol.

The ancient ritual treated it in a fashion which is not to be accounted for by sanitary considerations. The leper had to wear the signs of mourning for the dead. He was rigidly separated from society, though the balance of evidence goes to show that the disease was rarely, if at all, contagious. The ceremonial connected with his healing was elaborate and protracted, and restored him first to the communion of his brethren, and afterwards to participation in the blessings of the covenant with God. This whole legislation is intelligible only if we suppose that this one disease was selected in order to set forth the true connection between sin and

death, and to represent by the terrible analogies of bodily corruption and piecemeal dissolution the sickness of the soul and the ravages that are made in it. Leprosy was hereditary. It was incurable, at least to the medical skill of that age. Its progress was slow but certain. It ate away bone and flesh; limbs dropped, and the flesh was "half consumed." The sufferer was "a walking sepulchre," a ghastly "death in life." No wonder that leprosy should be called "the stroke," and that the leper should be taken by God, in His merciful law, as a living emblem of the death which is the wages of sin.

And we have our Lord's authority for seeing in this story of Naaman at least some of the principles which regulate the dispensation of His love and grace, exemplified for the world. He alleges it as an instance of the way in which the universal love over-leaped all national distinctions, and surged over the barriers which Jewish narrowness would have erected for its free course. "None of them were cleansed, save Naaman, the Syrian." These two facts, at least, warrant us in dealing by way of allusion and illustration with this whole story, as being a "little window through which we may see a great matter"—as being a picture for us of far wider things than itself.

I need not spend time over the remarkably graphic details of the story. Look, for instance, at that eloquent *but* in the very first verse. After all the pompous enumeration of the whole of Naaman's titles—"captain of the host of the king of Syria, a great man with his

master, and honourable, because by him the Lord hath given deliverance unto Syria"—(which, by the way, an old Jewish tradition explains by saying that he was the man who "pulled a bow at a venture" that killed Ahab) —comes the suggestive antithesis, made all the stronger by the absence in the original of the connecting "but" of our version—*but he was* a leper! There is a *but* in every man's fortunes, because there is a *but* in every man's character. The loving solicitude of the little slave-girl, the imperious insolence of the Syrian king's letter, the impotent despair of the king of Israel, the lofty confidence of the prophet, the ostentatious pageantry of the long train of horses and chariots with which the proud sick man travelled, and their halt there at the prophet's humble door, stand before us in the story as sharp and clear as objects do beneath that Eastern sky. The great man and all his cortége are kept outside, and God's servant will not even come out, but sends the message, "Go and wash in Jordan." That uncourtly reception is no piece of vulgar arrogance, like the pride of a pope that keeps an emperor standing in the snow in the castle yard for three days, before he will absolve him. It is the wise dealing of that Divine Word which, whether it come seeking those who seek it not, or remains still in the same place where it was, even when called upon with tears, or shows itself froward to the froward, hath ever one purpose of mercy in view, and pursues it equally when it "saves the afflicted," and when it "brings down the high looks."

With soldier-like quickness of temper and pride, he

flashes all at once into a blaze. Leper as he is, and, having come there to beg a cure, he cannot stand *this* with patience; and in his wrath, he lets us see curiously and naturally enough all his expectations, and what he thinks his reasonable ground of anger. He has not been treated with proper respect—"I thought he will surely come out to me"—to me, the great man with all these chariots and horsemen at my back, and talents of silver and pieces of gold, and changes of raiment in my bags, enough to make this pauper of a prophet a rich man for the rest of his life. He might at least have been civil enough to come out to me. I expected, too, that he would stand and call on the name of the Lord, his God, and make a great to-do, and perform some magical ceremonies, and so recover the leper; and instead of that, I get a message to go and wash in that little stream, the Jordan, when Abana and Pharpar, the sweet rivers of Damascus, are far better than all these. And so, pride, and sense, and national feeling were all blended together, and he turned and went away in a rage! Then his wiser servants calm him by reason, and remind him that he would have been willing to obey the prophet if he had prescribed him some hard thing, and that it was surely, therefore, common sense at any rate to see what would come of doing the very simple thing which he did command.

The characteristics which offended Naaman are the characteristics of God's cure for the leprosy of our spirits. They are its glory even though men may stumble at them. Look at them as brought out here.

I. Note then, what in this man's eyes was a fault—what, to clearer vision, is a glory—*the utter indifference of the Gospel to all distinctions among men.*

Naaman wanted to be treated as a great man that happened to be a leper; Elisha treated him as a leper that happened to be a great man. He did so, not out of rudeness or caprice, but to bring this thought home to him:—Your adventitious distinctions (as you might know and feel) are of very small consequence as long as your skin shines with the ghastly whiteness of death; and as long as it does, you must be willing, *first*, to be treated as a leper; and, *secondly*, as the commander-in-chief of the armies of Damascus.

And if we put this into more general words, we are brought into full view of that great characteristic of the Gospel which is at once its glory and its offence—that it deals with all men as on one level. The community in the sickness of sin destroys all distinctions. There is a prince lying on that bed; there a stable-boy on that. They are ill of the same disease, which affects the man, not his office. They need the same treatment, and—thank God!—they get it from Him who is no respecter of persons. There is abundant distinction of ranks made by all organized Christianity; for we all carry a greater or less measure of worldliness in us; and churches, and priests, and preachers, and congregations of all sorts, are only too ready to respect the gay clothing and the gold ring. But in so far as we do, we are untrue to our Master and to His message. The Gospel shows its Divine origin by this, that it brushes aside all these as utterly insignificant—

surface distinctions that mean nothing and are irrelevant, and goes right to the centre of the thing—to the heart of humanity, where we all of us are alike.

Such treatment is true to the fact of man's condition. For it is a fact that we are all alike in sin. In us all there has been and is a voluntary divergence and deflection from the line of right, which darkens a man's soul. "All the world is guilty before God!" You cannot refute, and you will not mend that old saying about man's condition. No other theory is so profoundly and accurately true, as that on which the Bible proceeds—the universal fact of sin, the universal guilt of sin, the universal burden of sin. That truth does not conflict with the other, which is sometimes urged as if it were antagonistic, but which the Bible distinctly recognizes, of the greatness and beauty of the fragments of something nobler and better that still remain; or with the other, to which it leads up, of the possibility of a recovery. It leaves undisputed the glowing words in which poets and thinkers have celebrated the dignity of humanity; only it asserts along with their assertion of what is true about man's nature, that man's nature now is unnatural, deformed, smitten with a leprosy, corroding by slow decay. It is the deepest message about our condition, responded to in that inmost chamber of the soul, where, in all of us, there slumbers a solemn voice that speaks sometimes as from afar, in low, curt, authoritative rebuke, and whensoever it speaks is the voice of God in the heart.

And then there is the other consideration, that, if this be so, then that moral and spiritual condition is,

in certain aspects, the most important thing about a man.

Let me put it into plain English. Whether do you think it matters most in your relation to God—yours and mine—that we are sinners, or that we are cultivated people? Whether do you think it matters most that our hearts have started aside from Him and our hands have done evil, or that we can read Latin and Greek books and are scholars? Whether do you think it matters most that we have broken God's commandments, or that here, in Manchester, we have made a quantity of money, and live in fine houses, and take a position before our fellows? Are we going to stand upon our miserable, tiny mole-hills beneath those solemn stars far above us and say—"Their light ought to fall upon us in another fashion from what it does on those people that live a little lower down"? I am a rich man. Come out and strike thy hand over the place. I have got a cultivated taste, a highly polished intellect. I must have another gospel from the vulgar crowd. I am a man of position and fame. I am not going to be treated like that poor old woman in her garret, like that soul struggling with insanity, like that little child, like that barbarian just dragged out of cannibalism and savagery. There must be something special for me!

There *is* something for you. If the distinctions on which you pride yourselves are worth anything, they will help you to apprehend and profit by God's gift. But the gift is one. You must be content to sit at the public table, to make one of the thousands on the grass there, fed with the same food as all the others,—women and

children, cripples and beggars among them,—are fed on. If my Pharisee or scribe *will* gather up his robes about him, and demand a meal apart, he will have to go without. It is the same air which vivifies all men's blood, the same light which gleams in all men's eyes, the same Gospel which saves all men's souls.

For this treatment of all men as alike sinners is the precursor of as universal a mercy. All are alike in two facts—that we have sinned, and that Christ has died for us. "He hath shut up all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all." As sin and death, so God's love and Christ's work know nothing of our superficial distinctions. Ere we meet in the indiscriminate lifelessness in the grave, which levels all in one corruption, we may meet in equal blessedness in the mercy of God in Christ, which raises us all to one height of pardon and peace. His love pours over all the walls of separation among men, and comes to you and me, dear brethren, as it comes to every soul upon earth, dealing with that in us which is common to us with all our fellows, and neglecting altogether that in us by which we are distinguished from our fellows. "There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free. There is neither male nor female" in the adaptation, in the destination, and in the invitation with which that Gospel comes to us.

And, therefore, some men turn away from it. There is the narrow gate! Plenty of room for you—no room for the load of adventitious distinctions that you carry upon your shoulders. And so "he turned, and went away in a rage!" And many a heart, all unconscious

perhaps of the course of thought which is leading to it, does the same thing. Men crave for a particular and special gospel, kick at the idea of being paralleled and levelled with every poor sinner and every fool upon the face of the earth; will not have the message that recognizes nothing except the common humanity, the common sin, and the universal pardon!

And let me remind you how this superb indifference of the Gospel to all these distinctions of man from man, is its true glory, and has wrought wonderful things. The Gospel came into a world all swathed in ligatures, all cleft into classes, parted from one another by deep gulfs which there was no bridging, where nations frowned at one another from their battlements, and caste, and class, and race, and culture rent men apart from their fellows, and nothing but the grip of an iron hand and the false unity of conquest held them together. The Gospel, the true democracy, came and struck the bonds from the slave, taught the sentiment of fraternity, gave a new word and a new thought to the languages of earth—"humanity"—made men and women equal possessors of an equal grace! Not by violent revolution, not by seeking to touch institutions, but by setting the example of bringing spiritual truths with brave confidence and utter contempt for all distinctions equally to every class of men! And the miner in his cave, and the prince upon his throne, and the grey barbarian, and the Christian child cluster together round the one throne. We being many are one bread, "for we are all partakers of that one bread." And class distinctions, and national rivalries, and professional enmities,

and all the narrowness which separate men from men pass away in proportion as the broad universalities of a Gospel that proclaims all under sin, and brings the equal remedy for the highest and the lowest, for the wisest and most foolish are discerned and accepted.

"He turned and went away in a rage!" And the world turns, and will yet do so in all its peoples and classes—no longer parted but blended in one faith, and one Lord, *to* Him who is the equal Saviour to the whole race of men.

II. We may draw from these words an illustration of what I venture to call *the naked simplicity of God's Gospel.*

He said, "Behold, I thought, he will come, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and so by all that ceremonial he will recover the leper." And what does he get instead of all this? Go and wash, and be clean.

It was very like a *heathen*, accustomed to muttered spells and magical incantations, whose whole religion clung close to the low levels of earth, whose gods and whose worship, whose hopes and whose fears, were alike material, to crave for some external ritual of cleansing. It was very like a *man* to long for something visible and tangible for his wavering confidence to lay hold upon—some fixed point belonging to solid earth to which he might fasten the filmy frailty of his faith. It was very like *God* to contradict the desire and to give him instead—only a promise to grasp, and a command to obey, which was chiefly a test of his obedience, since common sense told him that water could not wash away the eating evil.

and national pride rebelled against the pre-eminence of the river of Israel.

The like apparent antagonism between men's wishes and God's ways meets us in the Gospel—and the like correspondence between God's ways and men's real wants. Christianity comes to us—or rather, instead of that abstract word, let us say Christ, who *is* Christianity, comes to us—trusting wholly and only to spiritual remedies. He, too, says "wash and be clean." The one power that cleanses is His blood for pardon, His spirit for holiness. The one condition of receiving these is simple faith in Him; all externals are nothing. Forms and ceremonies, acts of worship, and church ordinances are of no avail. The bond that unites us to Him who is our life, is the medium through which life flows to us. And that one bond is faith; and that life is the life-giver who died for us. The Gospel depends wholly on spiritual forces, and is received only by spiritual acts.

And so people feel out of their element in a region thus purely spiritual and immaterial. The heathenism which is in all of us, the sense-bound materialism which sways us all, lays hold of the pure Gospel which Christ wrought and gives, and deforms it by tacking on to it an incongruous and heterogeneous appendage of rites and ceremonies, and by investing the simple ordinances which he enjoined with mysterious power. What is all that cloud of teaching about sacramental efficacy, which darkens the very Sun of righteousness, but a mist born from the marshes of sense that lie undrained in so-called Christendom? It is nothing else than the modern form

of ancient heathenism. It is the expression of the old desire to have God and His gifts brought within the limits of the senses. "Bring down this incorporeal attenuated nothing into the low region where I dwell." Let me have "good, strong, stupefying altar smoke"—to quote words familiar to some of you, in which that spirit is wonderfully expressed—and let me "see God made and eaten all day long" upon the altar there.

And so we are told that even such a story as this of our text points to the supernatural efficacy of baptism, and that "wash and be clean" is the symbol of that holy laver of regeneration. I need only say about that, that an external act cannot be the symbol of an external act. That is false heraldry, colour upon colour. If it is a symbol at all, the material must be a symbol of the spiritual; the outward act, of the inward submission to the cleansing of the soul; the washing which purified the leper, of the faith by which the sinner is cleansed—and the whole story, as we say, an illustration of that Divine simplicity, and abstinence from all reliance on outward acts, which is the very essence of God's way of salvation by Jesus Christ. For if one part of the story has to be transposed into another key, there will be discord, unless the whole be so. And if we are to say leprosy was the symbol of the soul-sickness of sin, and healing the symbol of the soul-cleansing of pardon and sanctifying, then we must lift the washing in the river of Israel into the same region, and recognize in it the symbol of the soul's act of faith, whereby our stained nature is plunged into that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.

Brethren, do you hold fast by the Divine simplicity of this Gospel. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing"—though it were the flesh that was broken for our salvation. Could we partake of it, what would *it* avail to give us life? Our Lord has answered the question in that very conversation which is so often appealed to as if it taught Sacramentarian teaching, for we find there, as if mutually explanatory, or rather identical—"He that believeth on me hath everlasting life; I am that bread of life;" and "whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life." We, who believe that the only feeding upon Christ is the occupation of mind, heart, and will with Him, His truth, His work, His commands, and that the Lord's Supper is simply a commemorative rite which helps us to remember, and blesses us as it brings His love and His death nearer to our thoughts and our hearts—we, who thus believe, are charged with holding a "bald," "naked," "bare" doctrine. It *is* naked, with the simplicity of a homogeneous system which does not begin in the spirit and find its consummation in the flesh. As Fuller says, somewhere—"Better to be threadbare than to have vermin lurking under the nap." And we may thank God for the naked simplicity of His Gospel—simple as all His work is simple, simple and unfathomable, with a simplicity through which shine the profoundest mysteries—and rejoice that there is one thing that saves a man, the love of God who sent His Son to die, and that there is one thing which knits a man to the source of salvation, faith in the perfect sacrifice of

that "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

But you, brethren, most of you stand in no danger such as this that I have been speaking of. But there is danger that you and I especially stand in. There is plenty of formalism outside the limits of formal churches. There may be as much formalism in a formless Quakerism as in the most developed ritualism; and as much heathenism in trusting to the absence of ritual as in trusting to its presence. And we, who are Nonconformists, by our very church polity are tempted to attach a false kind of value to church membership and to outward participation in Christian ordinances. We are constantly tempted to put the form in the place of the spirit. We reject the notion of Sacramental Efficacy—but we may be fancying ourselves better than other people because we are members of Christian churches, and take part in their work and worship. I am afraid that some of us think that the efficacy which we deny to the bread and wine of the communion resides in our forms of worship, and in our lists of members. We do not escape from the danger of making religion a thing of sense and of externals by rejecting this or that dogma; and we all need the warning, "Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Brethren, wash, and be clean! Nothing else will bring the healing. The naked simplicity of Christ's Gospel is but another way of saying—there is one power that pardons, saves, and there is one bond that knits us to that!

III. Then, finally, there is connected with this consideration, and yet somewhat distinct from it, the other, *the utter rejection by the Gospel of all our co-operation in our own cleansing.*

The words of Naaman himself do not explicitly contain his refusal to do what was required, on the ground that it was so small a thing. But that was evidently in his mind, as well as the other grounds of offence; and it comes out distinctly in the common-sense remonstrance by which his servants brought their irascible master to reason—"If the prophet had bid thee *do some great thing*, wouldest thou not have done *it?* how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

Men would be a great deal more willing to accept God's way of salvation if it gave them some share in their own salvation. But its characteristic is that it will have none of our work—not even so much as this man had to do in his healing. *He* was commanded to go and wash. The lustration had no power to produce cleansing. It was only an act of obedience—not a condition of his healing, in the proper sense of that word. *We* are commanded to wash and be clean. Our faith, by which we come into contact with Christ's cleansing blood, is more than Naaman's bathing in Jordan, and it is less. It is less, inasmuch as it is not asked from us as an act of obedience which will be rewarded with forgiveness—for if that were so, "salvation by faith" would only be a more refined kind of "salvation by works." It is more, inasmuch, as there is a real and intelligible connection between our faith and our

cleansing. But our salvation, though not secured without our faith, cannot be said, therefore, to be in any measure procured by our co-operation. "What shall we do," said the Jews, "that we might work the works of God?" "This is the work of God," said our Lord in answer, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

The Gospel rejects our co-operation just *because* it demands our faith. For what is faith? Is not an essential part of it the consciousness that we can do nothing, the forsaking and going out of ourselves, accompanying the flight to Him? The under side of faith is self-abnegation; the upper side is confidence in Christ. And, therefore, the proclamation that we are justified by faith, is at the same time the absolute refusal to give men any share in their own healing.

In like manner, remember that the same principle is further established because our faith is not the means of our cure, but only the bringing of our sickness into contact with the means. God's love in Christ, Christ's perfect work of reconciliation, Christ's Spirit poured out—these be the energies that heal; our faith is but lifting the eyelid that the light may fill the eye, but opening the door that the physician may enter.

And, therefore, because there is not a crevice in the whole process where self-trust can creep through, because from beginning to end God is all and man nought, our hearts rebel. We do not like to be paupers. We know that we are starving, and we will go to Him for corn, but we like to take our money in our sacks, and we do not

like to open them and find them filled with His gift, and our poor pieces of coin lying at the top. We will barter or buy heaven, but we had rather not have it as a gift. We will fast, and macerate ourselves, and go through a dreary round of observances, which are all the same in principle, whether we fix hooks in our backs and swing from them at festivals, or whether we have Protestant penances—but one thing we will *not* do if we can help it, and that is, cast ourselves on the undeserved, unbought mercy of God, and take pardon, and peace, and heaven as a free gift. If the prophet will only bid us do some great thing, we will try to do it. But if he says to us, "wash and be clean," we turn away. We are ready to spend our labour for that which satisfieth not; but when He offers us wine and milk, without money and without price, we will not accept it on such terms.

Brethren, Christ's work for us must be all in all, or not at all. There must be no eking out ours with His; no saying, "Well, I do as well as I can—and for the rest I will trust in Christ!" The old cannot be patched with the new in that fashion. You must throw away the rags, and let Him clothe you wholly from head to foot—not in your own righteousness, completed with bits of His—but in His wholly—"if so be that being clothed we may not be found naked." Powerless we are, but He is strong. Sick, but He is the healer. Leprous, but He both will and can make us clean.

It is the glory of the Gospel that it proclaims a work in which we have no share. Christ will do it all. Nay, Christ has done it all. Listen to that loud shout of

victory which bursts from the pall of eclipse that shrouds the cross, and breaks for the last time the awful silence. The piteous cry had been heard—so mysterious and heavy with the weight of men's sin, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" But the last word is as the triumphant voice of the Conqueror, who bears witness to Himself; and His witness is true—"It is finished," and He gave up the ghost. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us."

SERMON XVIII.

A PATTERN OF PRAYER.

PSALM lxxxvi, 1-5.

Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

"WHEN ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do." But earnest reiteration is not vain repetition. The one is born of doubt; the other of faith. The prayer that springs from a deep felt need, and will not cease till that need is supplied, may say the same things over a hundred times and yet they shall not be vain. Rather, as the same blood is repeatedly driven through the veins by the contraction and dilating of the heart, so all true prayer will flow forth over and over again, as the spirit opens in yearning, and closes itself in calm fruition on the grace it has received, and then dilates again in longing and sense of need. So the Master, who warned us against the paganism of empty repetitions,

enjoined upon us the importunity which prevails; and of Himself it is written, "And he left them and went away again the third time, saying the same words."

This faithful and prevailing reiteration remarkably characterizes the striking series of supplications in these verses. Substantially they are all one; but the varying phases of the one wish show how familiar it was in all its aspects to his mind; and the accumulation of them is the token of his earnest longing and profound sense of need. Like the great ancestor of his nation, he wrestles with God and prevails.

The whole Psalm is apparently of late date, and abounds with quotations from earlier songs—especially David's. In all probability, then, we have here a devout man in later ages, breathing out his cries to God, and using, as we do, consecrated words of earlier Scripture, which he freely reproduces and blends with his own petitions. That is no sign of cold artificial prayer, any more than our petitions are to be so regarded, because they often flow naturally in Bible words, which are hallowed by many associations, and using which, we unite our poor lives with those of the saints of old, who "cried unto God, and he heard them, and saved them out of all their distresses."

The fulness and variety of these petitions deserve careful consideration. My object now is mainly to bring out the richness of meaning which lies in them. Note the invocations, the petitions, and the pleas.

I. *The Invocations.*

I suppose there are few parts of our prayers, dear

brethren, formal as they all tend to be, which are more formal, mechanical, unmeaning, than our repetition of the name of Him to whom we speak. We round off sentences with it. We make beginnings of our prayers with it; we finish them conventionally, and properly, as we think, with it; but, if we rightly understand what the meaning is of that element of the prayer, which the old divines in their catechisms call invocation, we shall understand that it is the foundation of all, and that it professes, very distinctly, a faith which is anything but formal. For, when we call upon the name of God, if we do it aright, and come not under the condemnation of that commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"—what do we mean? What do we do thereby? Three things. We summon up before our thoughts that aspect of the Divine character which lies in the name that we utter. We do not pronounce a mere syllable. We utter a significant word that tells us something concerning God; and, when we use it, unless the majestic image which it is intended to flash into our mind do indeed coruscate and glow there, we had better be speaking in an unknown tongue, than with an unfruitful understanding. Further, we profess that we are exercising an act of faith in the character as revealed in that name. We say in effect: "This aspect of thy Divine all-sufficiency, this fragment of thine ineffable perfection, on this I build, and to this I make my appeal." Further, we bring before God His own character as a motive with Him. We say in effect: "I bring thee thyself, and in that mighty name, for the sake of what it declares, I ask

that these goods may be bestowed upon me." So, to invoke God is to contemplate His character, to trust in that character which we contemplate, and to believe that He responds to the obligations that are involved therein.

If that then be the general idea of invocation, we may now advance to notice how comprehensive and various are the names by which the Psalmist here calls upon his helper, God, and steadies his own confidence.

In general, this Psalm is remarkable for its frequent use of the Divine names. In almost every verse they recur, and their frequency gives us a vivid impression of earnestness, of consciousness of need, and of faith so sore pressed that it could only sustain itself by perpetual renewal of its grasp of God. Five times in these verses of our text does he invoke Him, and that by three several names—Jehovah, my God, Lord. These three sacred names have each a distinct meaning when used in prayer; they bring up various aspects of the character of God as the basis of our confidence, and the ground of our petitions.

He calls on Jehovah.

As to that first name, let me remind you in the briefest possible way that it has a double force in Scripture—one derived from its literal, philological meaning; the other derived from its historical use and development. As concerns the former of these two, as we all know, I suppose, the word substantially implies eternal, timeless being, underived self-existence. His name is, "I am that I am." He, who is and was and shall be, the one fontal source of all transitory and creatural life, who "himself unmoved moveth all things." And, then, the

name derives a force from the history of its origin and use. It was given as the seal of the covenant, as the ground of the great deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The national existence rested upon it. The vitality of Israel was guaranteed by the eternity of Israel's God. The bush that burnt and was not consumed was the emblem of Him who gives and is none the poorer, who works unwearied, who pours forth life and light through all ages to all creatures, and diminishes no whit the fulness of the fountain of life which is with Him. And that undecaying, inexhausted being is the pledge of Israel's security, the guarantee that "He will not alter the thing that is gone out of His lips." It was the pledge and the basis of the great deliverance which made Israel a nation—it was a name that expressed God's purpose to form that people into His people, who should show forth His praise.

When we use it in our prayers we contemplate and trust in and plead with Him, all these grand thoughts of eternal subsistence, inexhaustible power, unwearied strength, resources that never fail, purposes that never alter, a being that never fails, a nature lifted high above the mutations of time, who dwells in a region above all tenses and moods, and *is*, and *was*, and *is to come* in one ineffable and mysterious present. Nor only so—but we likewise say—"and this rock of ages and basis of all that is, hath spoken and entered into the bonds of love and covenant with men, whereby they can plead with Him His revealed character, and appeal to Him on the ground of His ancient promise, and begin all their believing

petitions with that cry—O Jehovah, who livest for evermore; O Jehovah, the God of the covenant, and the deliverer of thy people!"

And, further, note the other name on which the Psalmist rests both petitions and pleas, "O thou *my God.*"

I need only remark that, so far as its own proper meaning is concerned, this name contains only what one might call the natural conception of divinity, as distinguished from the former, which is emphatically the name of the God of revelation. The word implies the abundance and fulness of power, and so may be found, and often is found, on the lips of heathens. It contemplates the Almightiness, rather than the moral attributes or covenant relations of God, as the ground of our hopes.

But then, note how this general conception, which in itself does not travel beyond the idea common to all men of an unseen might throned in the heavens, becomes special on the Psalmist's lips by the little word which he prefixes to it "*my* God."

So far as we can judge from Scripture, it was David who first ventured to claim by that name the might of the God of Israel for *his*. "*My* God" is the token stamped upon David's Psalms. The warmth of personal affection which throbs through them, and the firmness of personal confidence are wonderfully expressed by that one word, which appropriates the strength and grace of the covenant for the solace of the single soul.

Whether this Psalm be his, or, as seems most probable, the work of a later lover of God, it is moulded after the

type of his Psalms. This second invocation of God derives its force from that one word which contemplates the unlimited strength and Divine loftiness as all possessed by, and enlisted on the side of the poor soul that cries to Him. His bold and reverent hand stretches out to grasp the whole fulness of God. Thou art the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the whole earth—but thou art my God, mine for my faith, mine for my help.

Then, the final name which the Psalmist here employs —"Lord"—is not, as a mere English reader might suppose, the same word as that which is rendered "LORD" in the first verse. That, as we have said, is Jehovah. This means just what our English word "lord" means; it conveys the general idea of authority and dominion. If you will observe, it is the most frequent name in this Psalm. Its force on the Psalmist's lips, and the thoughts which he associated with it, may be gathered from succeeding verses. "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord, neither are there any works like unto thy works"—where incomparable elevation and supreme dominion are ascribed to Him. So, the Psalmist goes on, "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name, for thou art great," where the thoughts of universal sovereignty, and exaltation above all our subject littleness, are deduced from that name.

So, then, when we blend all these together—it is as if the Psalmist had said, "The ever living, the covenant Jehovah, my God in whom I claim a personal interest,

who loves me with an individualizing love, and cares for me with a specific care, the absolute monarch and sovereign of the whole universe is He to whom I come with my supplication. I think of His names, I trust in them, I present them to Him, whom they all but partially declare; and I ask Him—for His own name's sake, because of what He is and hath declared Himself to be, to hear my poor cry, to answer my imperfect faith, to show Himself yet once again that which His name hath from of old proclaimed Him to be."

Dear brethren, for us to know and trust that name is the highest exercise of all faith. To utter it believing is the very essence of all true prayer. Not as a formal beginning and as a formal close, but as the only ground of acceptance, do we connect it with our petitions. It should begin our prayers as their foundation, it should end them as their seal.

The bare utterance of a name may be the purest formalism, or it may be the most intense faith. The deepest love often finds that all language fails, and that to breathe the beloved name is enough. All tenderness may be put in it—all rapture, all praise. Do you remember the wonderful story of the resurrection morning. "Jesus said unto her, Mary. She saith unto him Rabboni"? Her name on His lips was enough for unveiling His heart and revealing His person; His name on her lips was enough to express the confession of her faith, the eager rush of her spirit to Him, the outpouring of her heart, the ecstacy of her gladness that had died with Him and lived now, raised again from the dead.

Did any of you, parents, ever hear your child wake from sleep with some panic fear, and shriek the mother's name through the darkness? Was not that a more powerful appeal than all words? And, depend upon it, that the soul which cries aloud on God, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," though it have "no language but a cry," will never call in vain.

II. So much then for the invocation, and now a word or two in reference to *the petitions* which these verses give us.

As I have said, they are all substantially the same, and yet they so vary as to suggest how familiar all the aspects of the deliverance that the Psalmist desired were to him. We may discern, I think, a progress of thought through them, upon which I touch for a moment. The petitions are—"Bow thine ear," "hear me," "preserve me," "save thy servant," "be merciful unto me," "rejoice the soul of thy servant." There is, first, the cry that God would *hear*, the basis of all that follows. There is then a threefold description of the process of deliverance—"preserve," "save," "be merciful." Then there is a longing for that which comes after the help, a consequence of the hearing —"Make the soul of thy servant glad."

It is very significant, and may teach us some lessons worth learning, that the Psalmist, prior to all special supplication, begins with that cry—"Incline thine ear; hear me." "What!" you say, "does not God know everything?" "What is the use of praying to an Omniscient ear to hear?" Yes, no doubt. And do you think that what I may call the cold, passionless, *natural*

knowledge of Omniscience is enough for our hearts? Something more goes to the "hearing" of prayer than the necessary omniscience of an infinite Divine nature. There is an act of loving will, which is most clearly conveyed by that strong, and yet plain and intelligible, metaphor, "*Bow down* thine ear," as an eager listener puts his hand to his ear and bends the lobe of it in the direction of the sound.

He prays, too, in that petition, for what we may call hearing *embodied in an act* of deliverance. With God, to hear *is* to answer. As soon as we desire He knows our longing; as soon as He knows our longing He meets it with His gift. No appreciable time is occupied in the passage of the imploring message from earth to heaven, none in the return message of blessing from heaven to earth. As David says, in the grand Psalm which recounts his deliverances, "My cry came before him, even unto his ears. *Then*, the earth shook and trembled." He hears when He lovingly regards our prayers; He hears when he mightily answers our cry—and these two are one.

The Psalmist further prays for acts of help and deliverance,—"Preserve my soul;" "save thy servant;" "be merciful unto me." These petitions are all substantially the same; but yet there are shades of difference between them which deserve notice. The first of them might be rendered, "guard" or "watch" my soul—and that rendering helps us to distinguish it from the others. Looking at all three, we see that the first prays for protection; the second goes a step farther, and prays for

happy issue of that protection in safety; and the third digs deeper, and prays for that mercy which is the sole foundation of both the protection and the safety which it ensures. God's guardianship achieves our salvation, and His saving guardianship is the fruit of His mercy.

While these three petitions then differ thus, in that they contemplate the process of our deliverance in its deepest root, in its patient sedulous method, and in its happy end, they also differ in that they embody varying thoughts of the need and weakness of the suppliant. In the two former he regards himself as defenceless and in peril. He needs a great hand to be cast round him, in the hollow of which he may be safe. His soul lies open to the assaults of foes, like some little unwalled village in the plains, and he craves the garrison and guardianship of God's presence, the watchfulness of His unslumbering eye. In the last he thinks of himself as lowly and unworthy—for "mercy" is love shown to inferiors, or to those who deserve something else. The consciousness of helplessness has become a consciousness of sin. Protection is not all that we need. There must be pardon too. That hand which is to be outstretched to guard and save might justly have been outstretched to smite. The sole ground of our confidence that God will be "our guard while troubles last," and will save us with a full salvation at the last, is our trust that He will not refuse mercy to those who own their sin, and seek it through Jesus Christ.

It is worth notice, too, that in all this variety of petitions for deliverance, there is not a word about the

exact manner of it. The way in which God's mercy is to guard and save is left, with meek patience, to God's decision. Let us not prescribe to Him the path which He shall take, but commit that to His own loving wisdom. There are two methods of lightening a burden—one is to diminish the load, the other is to strengthen the shoulders that carry it. The latter is often the more blessed—and often the shape in which God answers our prayer. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee."

Then, in the final petition, the Psalm rises still higher, and not satisfied with imploring that God would hear, guard, and save—asks for gladness, too, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant."

We may venture to ask and expect gladness if we are God's servants. All His creatures have a claim on Him for blessedness according to their capacity, so long as they stand where He has set them—and we, who have departed from that obedience which is joy, may yet, in penitent abasement, return to Him and ask that He would rejoice the soul of His servant. David's deepest repentance dared to ask, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Our most troubled utterances of sore need, our sighs and groans, should be accompanied with faith which feels the summer's sun of joy even in the mid-winter of our pain, and sees vineyards in the desert. We should believe in, and hope, and ask for more than bare deliverance—hard though it be to think that gladness is any

more possible. Blossoms and flowers will come again, however untimely frosts have burned the young leaves into brown powder. No sorrow is so crushing and hopeless, but that happiness may again visit the heart, where trust and love abide. Only let us remember that this Psalm seeks for joy, where it seeks for help, not from earthly sources, but from God. Cisterns may be broken, but the fountain cannot be choked up with their ruins. They who find their deliverance in God are often tempted to find their pleasure somewhere else. It is often easier to pray with tears, "Preserve me and save me," than with undistracted love to choose Him as our only delight. But the true devout heart turns equally to God for all it needs—and its prayer ever is, "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause. . . . O deliver me—then will I go unto the altar of God, to God, the gladness of my joy."

III. Finally, we have to consider *the pleas* on which these petitions are based.

The logic of prayer here is very remarkable and beautiful. Every feature of the Psalmist's condition and character, as well as all that he knows of God, becomes in his lips a reason with God for granting his prayer. The same ingenuity of faith, if one might use such a phrase, which that Syro-Phœnician woman showed when she laid hold of the apparent repulse of her suit, and gave back to Christ His own parable as a reason for His compliance—comes out here.

These pleas part into three. He pleads *his necessities*. He is "poor and needy," or rather, perhaps—giving a distinct meaning to each word—"afflicted and poor,"

borne down by the pressure of outward calamity, and destitute of inward resources. So the one phase of our need is the evils that oppress us from without, and the other is the lack of power from within to bear up against these. Circumstances and character both constitute an appeal to God. Or, more simply, we are weighed upon with sore distress, and we are likewise beggared of all means either without or within.

Yes, brethren, by God's mercy we are emboldened to take our weakness, our helplessness, as pleas with Him. We know how often the sight of misery touched the heart of Christ, and how He was "moved with compassion," and we believe that the compassion of Christ is our truest image of the pity of our God. The yawning emptiness of our parched hearts, thirsting for God, like the cracked ground in drought, is a plea with Him. And when we draw near to His throne, we do not need to present our merits but our necessities in order to receive the answer. "Lord save, we perish," is our best cry to awaken to energy the hand that never sleeps. Let no consciousness of evil drive us from Him, but rather let it impel us close to Him. The devil's lie is that we are too bad to go to Him. The truth is that our necessities—aye and our sins too—may be made pleas with Him. "Pardon mine iniquity, *for it is very great.*"

He pleads his *relation to God* and his *longing for communion* with Him.

"I am holy." That sounds strange. There is a flavour of self-righteousness about it which startles one. But there is no such thought in the word, and the "holy"

of the English version completely obscures the Psalmist's thought. It will be enough here to say that the word of the original simply means "one who is a recipient or object of mercy." It is passive, not active, in signification. Of course the mercy meant is God's mercy, so that the meaning is as our Bible has it in the margin, "One whom thou favourest." The plea then here is drawn, not from the righteousness of the man, but from the mercy of God. It sets forth the relation between God and His suppliant from the Divine side, and pleads God's gracious bestowal of mercy upon him in the past as a reason for its continuance and perfecting. "Thou hast been pleased to love and favour me, to enrich me with thy grace. Be what thou hast been: do what thou hast done: forsake not the work of thine own hands." And God, who begins no buildings which He is not able to finish, recognizes the strength of the plea—and will perfect that which concerneth us.

There follows the same relation contemplated from the human side, and that, too, is a plea with God. "Thy servant that trusteth in thee." I am knit to Thee, as a servant I belong to Thy household, and the Master's honour is concerned in His dependent's safety. The slave is cared for by His Lord. I belong to Thee—do thou watch over what is thine own. I trust in Thee. We do not plead our faith as constituting a claim of merit with God, but as constituting a plea with Him. It is not that it deserves deliverance—else we might well hesitate to urge it, when we think of its weakness and often interruptions—but that it is sure to bring deliverance. For

anything is possible rather than that the most tremulous trust should go unblest and unanswered.

The human side of the relation between God and His servant is further urged in the subsequent clauses which refer to the Psalmist's longings and efforts after fellowship with God. "I cry unto thee daily"—he does not think that his cry deserves an answer, but he knows that in God's great mercy He has bound Himself to "hear our cry and save us"; and he appeals to the faithful promise. He has put in practice the condition, and he expects the answer. It cannot but be that he who calls on God will be answered. Anything is credible rather than that our prayer ascending should be flung back unanswered, as if it had struck against heavens which were brass. Let our faith clasp His promise, and then the fact of our prayer is with God a plea, and with us a pledge of His answer. Let us not doubt that we *do* wield power with God when we pray—and we shall prevail.

Again he pleads, "Unto thee do I lift up my soul." That expresses the conscious effort to raise his whole being above earth, to lift the heavy grossness of his nature, bound in the fetters of sense to this low world, up and up to the Most High who is his home. And can it be that that yearning and striving after communion shall go unsatisfied? Is it possible that I shall stretch out feeling hands and grope in vain for God? Is it possible that He shall not take note of me, that my poor faith shall be disappointed, that my prayer shall be lost in empty space, that my soul shall not find its Rest? Never. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread,

will he give him a stone?—How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

And, finally, because our necessities, and our desires derive their force as pleas from *God's own character*, he urges that as his last and mightiest appeal. He began with invocation, and he ends as he began. The name of God is the ground of all our hope, and the motive for all His mercy. Turn away, brethren, from all thoughts of self, of your own needs, of your own trust, and prayer, and aspiration. Forsaking all other confidence, flee to that "name of the Lord," into which, as "a strong tower," we may "run and be safe." The one prevalent plea with God is the faithful recounting of all that grace and pity which He is and has exercised. All others are subordinate, and possess only a power bestowed by this. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." Our need is the occasion; our faith and desire the channel; but Himself is the reason, as Himself is the source, of all our deliverance and all our salvation. "Because he could sware by no greater, he sware by himself"—and because we can pray by none other, we implore Him by Himself, for the sake of His own Holy Name, because He is that He is, to have mercy upon us who cry to Him.

And, brethren, when *we* call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, and ask that *our* prayers may be heard "for the sake of Christ," we are taking no other plea into our lips than that ancient and all prevalent one of

this Psalm. It is His own mercy in Christ which we present. It is the work of His own love which we bring as our plea. "I have declared thy name unto my brethren." Christ is the Revealer of the Father's name, and they who pray in the name of Christ have for their confidence this promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son"—and this. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

SERMON XIX.

THE TOILING CHRIST.

MARK iv, 36—38.

They took him even as he was in the ship. . . . . And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.

AMONG the many loftier characteristics belonging to Christ's life and work, there is a very homely one which is often lost sight of; and that is, the amount of hard physical exertion, prolonged even to fatigue and exhaustion, which He endured.

Christ is our pattern in a great many other things more impressive and more striking; and He is our pattern in this, that "in the sweat of his brow" He did His work, and knew not only what it was to suffer, but what it was to toil for man's salvation. And, perhaps, if we thought a little more than we do of such a prosaic characteristic of His life as that, it might invest it with some more reality for us, besides teaching us other large and important lessons.

I have thrown together these two clauses for our text now, simply for the sake of that one feature which they both portray so strikingly.

"They took him even as he was into the ship." And many expositors suppose that in the very form of that phrase there is suggested the extreme of weariness and exhaustion which He suffered, after the hard day's toil. Whether that be so or no, the swiftness of the move to the little boat, although there was nothing in the nature of danger or of imperative duty to hurry them away, and His going on board without a moment's preparation, leaving the crowd on the beach, seem most naturally accounted for by supposing that He had come to the last point of physical endurance, and that His frame, worn out by the hard day's work, needed one thing—rest.

And so, the next thing that we see of Him is that, as soon as He gets into the ship He falls fast asleep on the wooden pillow—a hard bed for His head!—in the stern of the little fishing boat, and there He lies so tired—let us put it into plain prose and strip away the false veil of big words with which we invest that nature—so tired that the storm does not awake Him; and they have to come to Him, and lay their hands upon Him, and say to Him, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" before compassion again beat back fatigue, and quickened Him for fresh exertions.

This, then, is the one lesson I want to consider now, and there are three points which I deal with in pursuance of my task. I wish to point out a little more in detail the signs that we have in the Gospel of this characteristic of Christ's work—the toilsomeness of His service; then to consider, secondly, the motives which He himself tells us impelled to such service; and then, finally, the worth which that toil bears for us.

I. First, then, let me point out some of the significant hints which the Gospel records give us of *the toilsomeness of Christ's service.*

Now we are principally indebted for these to this Gospel by Mark, which ancient tradition has set forth as being especially and eminently the "Gospel of the servant of God," therein showing a very accurate conception of its distinguishing characteristics. Just as Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the King, regal in tone from beginning to end; just as Luke's is the Gospel of the man, human and universal in its tone; just as John's Gospel is the Gospel of the Eternal Word, so Mark's is the Gospel of the servant. The inscription written over it all might be, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." "Behold my servant whom I uphold."

And if you will take this briefest of all the Gospels, and read it over from that point of view, you will be surprised to discover what a multitude of minute traits make up the general impression, and what a unity is thereby breathed into the narrative.

For instance, did you ever observe the peculiar beginning of this Gospel. There are here none of the references to the prophecies of the King, no tracing of His birth through the royal stock to the great progenitor of the nation, no adoration by the Eastern sages, which we find in Matthew, no miraculous birth nor growing childhood as in Luke, no profound unveiling of the union of the Word with God before the world was, as in John, but the narrative begins with His baptism, and passes at once to the story of His work. The same ruling idea

accounts for the uniform omission of the title "Lord," which in Mark's Gospel is never applied to Christ until after the resurrection. There is only one apparent exception, and there good authorities pronounce the word to be spurious. Even in reports of conversations which are also given in the other Gospels, and where "Lord" occurs, Mark, of set purpose, omits it, as if its presence would disturb the unity of the impression which he desires to leave. You will find the investigation of the omissions in this Gospel full of interest, and remarkably tending to confirm the accuracy of the view which regards it as the Gospel of the servant.

Notice then these traits of His service which it brings out.

The first of them I would suggest is—how distinctly it gives the impression of *swift, strenuous work*. The narrative is brief and condensed. We feel, all through these earlier chapters at all events, the presence of the pressing crowd coming to Him and desiring to be healed. And but a word can be spared for each incident as the story hurries on, trying to keep pace with His rapid service of quick-springing compassion and undelaying help. There is one word which is reiterated over and over again in these earlier chapters, remarkably conveying this impression of haste and strenuous work. Mark's favourite word is "straightway," "immediately," "forthwith," "anon," which are all translations of one expression You will find, if you glance over the first, second, or third chapters at your leisure, that it comes in at every turn. Take these instances which strike one's eye at the

moment, "*Straightway* they forsook their nets;" "*Straightway* he entered into the synagogue;" "*Immediately* his fame spread abroad throughout all the region;" "*Forthwith* they entered into the house of Simon's mother;" "*Anon*, they tell him of her;" "*Immediately* the fever left her." And so it goes on through the whole story, a picture of a constant succession of rapid acts of mercy and love. The story seems, as it were, to pant with haste to keep up with Him as He moves among men, swift as the sunbeam, and continuous in the outflow of His love as these unceasing rays!

Again, we see in Christ's service, toil prolonged to the point of actual physical exhaustion. The narrative before us is the most striking instance of that which we meet with. It had been a long wearying day of work. According to this chapter, the whole of the profound parables concerning the kingdom of God had immediately preceded the embarkation. But even these, with their explanation, had been but a part of that day's labours. For, in Matthew's account of them, we are told that they were spoken on the same day as that on which His mother and brethren came desiring to speak with Him,—or, as we elsewhere read, with hostile intentions to lay hold on Him as mad and needing restraint. And that event, which we may well believe touched deep and painful chords of feeling in His human heart, and excited emotions more exhausting than much physical effort, occurred in the midst of an earnest and prolonged debate with emissaries from Jerusalem, in the course of which He spoke the solemn words concerning blasphemy

against the Holy Ghost, and Satan casting out Satan, and poured forth some of His most terrible warnings, and some of His most beseeching entreaties. No wonder that, after such a day, the hard pillow of the boat was a soft resting-place for His wearied head; no wonder that, as the evening quiet settled down on the mountain-girdled lake, and the purple shadows of the hills stretched athwart the water, He slept; no wonder that the storm which followed the sunset did not wake Him; and beautiful, that wearied as He was, their cry at once rouses Him, and the fatigue which marks His manhood gives place to the Divine energy which says unto the sea, "Peace! be still." The lips which a moment before had been parted in the soft breathing of wearied sleep, now open to utter the omnipotent word—so wonderfully does He blend the human and the Divine, "the form of a servant" and the nature of God.

We see, in Christ, toil that *puts aside the claims of physical wants.* Twice in this Gospel we read of this. "The multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread." "There were many coming and they had no leisure so much as to eat."

We see in Christ's service a love *which is at every man's beck and call,* a *toil cheerfully rendered at the most unreasonable and unseasonable times.* As I said a moment or two ago, this Gospel makes you feel, as none other of these narratives do, the pressure of that ever-present multitude, the whirling excitement that there was round the calm centre. It tells us, for instance, more than once how Christ, wearied with His toil, feeling in body and in

spirit the need of rest and still communion, withdrew Himself from the crowd. He departed alone once that He might seek God in prayer; once He went with His wearied disciples apart into a desert place to rest awhile. On both occasions the retirement is broken in upon before it is well begun. The sigh of relief in the momentary rest is scarcely drawn, and the burden laid down for an instant, when it has to be lifted again. His solitary prayer is broken in upon by the disciples, with "All men seek for thee," and without a murmur or a pause, He buckles to His work again, and says, "Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also: for therefore am I sent."

When He would carry His wearied disciples with Him for a brief breathing time to the other side of the sea, and get away from the thronging crowd, "the people saw Him departing," and ran afoot out of all cities, and making their way round the head of the lake, were all there at the landing-place before Him. Instead of seclusion and repose, here was the same throng and bustle. Here they were, most of them from mere curiosity, some of them no doubt with deeper feelings; here they were with their diseased and their demoniacs, and as soon as His foot touches the shore He is in the midst of it all again. And He meets it, not with impatience at this rude intrusion on His privacy, not with refusals to help. But one emotion filled His heart. He forgets all about weariness, and hunger, and retirement, and "He was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep, not having a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things.' Such a picture may well shame our

languid, self-indulgent service, may stir us to imitation and to grateful praise.

There is only one other point which I touch upon for a moment, as showing the toil of Christ, and that is drawn from another Gospel.

Did you ever notice the large space occupied in Matthew's Gospel by the record of the last day of His public ministry, and how much of all that we know of His mission and message, and the future of the world and of all men, we owe to the teaching of these four-and-twenty hours? Let me put together in a word what happened on that day.

It included the conversation with the chief priests and elders about the baptism of John, the parable of the householder that planted a vineyard and digged a wine-press, the parables of the kingdom of heaven, the controversy with the Herodians about the tribute money, the conversation with the Sadducees about the resurrection, with the Pharisee about the great commandment in the law, the silencing of the Pharisees by pointing to the hundred and tenth Psalm, the warning to the multitude of the scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites, protracted and prolonged up to that wail of disappointed love, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And, as though that had not been enough for one day, when He is going home from the temple to find, for a night, in that quiet little home of Bethany, the rest that He wants, as He rests wearily on the slopes of Olivet, the disciples come to Him, "Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?"

and there follows all that wonderful prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, the parable of the fig tree, the warning not to suffer the thief to come, and the promise of reward for the faithful and wise servant, the parable of the ten virgins, and in all probability the parable of the king with the five talents; and the words that might be written in letters of fire, that tell us the final course of all things, and the judgment of life eternal and death everlasting! All that was the work of "one of the days of the Son of Man." Of Him it was prophesied long ago, "For Jerusalem's sake I will not rest:" and His life on earth, as well as His life in heaven, fulfils the prediction—the one by the toilsomeness of His service, the other by the unceasing energy of His exalted power. He toiled unwearied here, He works unresting there.

II. In the second place, let me ask you to notice how we get from our Lord's own words a glimpse into *the springs of this wonderful activity.*

There are three points which distinctly come out in various places in the Gospels as His motives for such unresting sedulousness and continuance of toil. The first is conveyed by such words as these: "I must work the works of him that sent me." "Let us preach to other cities, also: for therefore am I sent." "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." All these express one thought. Christ lived and toiled, and bore weariness and exhaustion, and counted every moment as worthy to be garnered up and precious,

as to be filled with deeds of love and kindness, because wherever He went, and whatsoever He set His hand to, He had the one consciousness of a great task laid upon Him by a loving Father whom He loved, and whom, therefore, it was His joy and His blessedness to serve.

And, remember, that motive made the life homogeneous—of a piece; and in all the variety of service, one spirit was expressed, and, therefore, the service was one. No matter whether He were speaking words of grace or of rebuke, or working works of power and love, or simply looking a look of kindness on some outcast, or taking a little child in His arms, or stilling with the same arms outstretched the wild uproar of the storm—it was all the same. To Him life was all one. There was nothing great, nothing small; nothing so insignificant that it could be done negligently; nothing so hard that it surpassed His power. The one motive made all duties equal; obedience to the Father called forth His whole energy at every moment. To Him life was not divided into a set of tasks of varying importance, some of which could be accomplished with a finger's touch, and some of which demanded a dead lift and strain of all the muscles. But whatsoever His hand found to do He did with His might; and that because He felt, be it big or little, that it all came, if I may so say, into the day's work, and all was equally great because "the Father that sent him had laid it upon Him."

There is one thing that makes life mighty in its veriest trifles, worthy in its smallest deeds, that delivers it from monotony, that delivers it from insignificance. All will

be great, and nothing will be overpowering, when living in communion with Jesus Christ, we say as he says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."

And then, still further, another of the secret springs that move His unwearied activity, His heroism of toil, is the thought expressed in such words as these:—"While I am in the world I am the light of the world." "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."

Jesus Christ manifested on earth performs indeed a work—the mightiest which He came to do—which was done precisely then when the night did come—namely, the work of His death, which is the atonement and propitiation for the sins of the world. And, further, the night, when no man can work, was not the end of His activity for us; for He carries on His work of intercession and rule, His work of bestowing the gifts purchased by His blood, amidst the glories of heaven; and that perpetual application and dispensing of the blessed issues of His death He has Himself represented as greater than the works to which His death put a period, when He healed the bodies and spoke to the hearts of those who heard, and lived a perfect life here upon this sinful earth But yet even He recognized the brief hour of sunny life as being an hour that must be filled with service, and recognized the fact that there was a task that He could only do when He lived the life of a man upon earth. And so, if I might so say, He was a miser of the moments, and carefully husbanding and garnering up every capacity and every opportunity, He toiled with the toil of a man

who has a task before him, that must be done when the clock strikes six, and who sees the hands move over the dial, and by every glance that he casts at it is stimulated to intenser service and to harder toil. Christ felt that impulse to service which we all ought to feel. "The night cometh; let me fill the day with work."

And then there is a final motive which I need barely touch. He was impelled to His sedulous service not only by loving, filial obedience to the Divine law, and by the consciousness of a limited and defined period into which all the activity of one specific kind must be condensed, but also by the motive expressed in such words as these, in which this Gospel is remarkably rich, "And Jesus, *moved with compassion*, put forth his hand and touched him."

Thus, along with that supreme consecration, along with that swift ardour that will fill the brief hours ere nightfall with service, there was the constant pity of that beating heart that moved the diligent hand. Christ, if I may so say, could not help working as hard as He did, so long as there were so many men round about Him that needed His sympathy and His aid.

III. So much then for the motives; and now a word finally as *to the worth of this toil for us.*

I do not stay to elucidate one consideration that might be suggested, viz., how precious a proof it is of Christ's humanity. We should find it easier to bring home His true manhood to our thoughts, when we remember that He, like us, knew the pressure of physical fatigue. Not only was it a human spirit that wept and rejoiced, that was moved with compassion, and sometimes with indig-

nation, but it was a human body, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that, wearied with walking in the burning sun, sat on the margin of the well; that was worn out and needed to sleep; that knew hunger, as is testified by His sending the disciples to buy meat; that was thirsty, as is testified by His saying, "Give me to drink." The true corporeal manhood of Jesus Christ, and the fact that that manhood is the tabernacle of God —without these two facts, the morality and the teaching of Christianity swing loose *in vacuo*, and have no holdfast in history, nor any leverage by which they can move men's hearts! But, when we know that the common necessities of fatigue, and hunger, and thirst belonged to Him, then we gratefully and reverently say, "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same."

This fact of Christ's toil is of worth to us in other ways.

Is not that hard work of Jesus Christ's a lesson for us, brethren, in our daily tasks and toils—a lesson which, if it were learnt and practised, would make a difference not only on the intensity but upon the spirit with which we labour? A great deal of fine talk is indulged in about the dignity of labour and the like. Labour is a curse until communion with God in it, which is possible through Jesus Christ, makes it a blessing and a joy. Christ, in the sweat of His brow, won our salvation; and our work only becomes great when it is work done in, and for, and by Him.

And what do we learn from His example? We learn these things:—the plain lesson, first, is—task all your

capacity and use every minute in doing the thing that is plainly set before you to do. Christian virtues are sometimes thought to be unreal and unworldly things. I was going to say the root of them, certainly the indispensable accompaniment for them all, is the plain, prosaic, most unromantic virtue of hard work.

And beyond that, what do we learn? The lesson that you toilers in Manchester want. There is no need to preach to the most of you to work any harder, in one department of work at any rate; but there is great need to remind you of what it was that at once stirred Jesus Christ into energy and kept Him calm in the midst of it all—and that was that everything was equally and directly referred to His Father's will. People talk now-a-days about "missions." The only thing worth giving that name to is the "mission" which *He* gives us, who sends us into the world, not to do our own will, but to do the will of Him that sent us. There is a fatal monotony in all our lives—a terrible amount of hard drudgery in them all. We have to set ourselves morning after morning to tasks that look to be utterly insignificant and disproportionate to the power that we bring to bear upon them—like elephants picking up pins with their trunks; and yet we may make all our common-place drudgery great, and wondrous, and fair, and full of help and profit to our souls, if, over it all—our shops, our desks, our ledgers, our studies, our kitchens, and our nurseries—we write, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." We may bring the greatest principles to bear upon the smallest duties.

What more do we learn from Christ's toil? The possible harmony of communion and service. His labour did not break His fellowship with God. He was ever in the secret place of the Most High, even while He was in the midst of crowds. He has taught us that it is possible to be in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives, and by His ensample, as by His granted Spirit, encourages us to aim at so serving that we shall never cease to behold, and so beholding that we shall never cease to serve our Father. The life of contemplation and the life of practice, so hard to harmonize in our experience, perfectly meet in Christ.

What more do we learn from our Lord's toils. The cheerful constant postponement of our own ease, wishes, or pleasure to the call of the Father's voice, or to the echo of it in the sighing of such as be sorrowful. I have already referred to the instances of His putting aside His need for rest, and His desire for still fellowship with God at the call of whoever needed Him. It was the same always. If a Nicodemus comes by night, if a despairing father forces his way into the house of feasting, if another suppliant finds Him in a house, where He would have remained hid, if they come running to Him in the way, or drop down their sick before Him through the very roof—it is all the same. He never thinks of Himself, but gladly addresses Himself to heal and bless. How such an example followed would change our lives and amaze and shake the world!—"I come, not to do mine own will." "Even Christ pleased not himself."

But that toil is not only a pattern for our lives; it is

an appeal to our grateful hearts. Surely a toiling Christ is as marvellous as a dying Christ! And the immensity and the purity and the depth of His love are shown no less by this, that He labours to accomplish it, than by this that He dies to complete it. He will not give blessings which depend upon mere will, and can be bestowed as a king might fling a largess to a beggar without effort, and with scarce a thought, but blessings which He Himself has to agonize and to energize, and to lead a life of obedience, and to die a death of shame, in order to procure. "I will not offer burnt-offering to God of that which doth cost me nothing," says the grateful heart. But in so saying it is but following in the track of the loving Christ, who will not give unto man that which cost Him nothing, and who works, as well as dies, in order that we may be saved.

And, O brethren, think of the contrast between what Christ has done to save us, and what we do to secure and appropriate that salvation! He toiled all His days, buying our peace with His life—going down into the mine and bringing up the jewels at the cost of His own precious blood. And you and I stand with folded arms, too apathetic to take rich treasures that are freely given to us of God! He has done everything that we may have nothing to do, and we will not even put out our slack hands to clasp the grace purchased by His blood, and commended by His toil! "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

SERMON XX.

CONSIDER CHRIST.

HEBREWS iii, 1.

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

THERE are few things which the ordinary religious life of this day needs more than patient, quiet meditation. It is full of energy, of liberality, of zeal for what it believes to be truth. Works of benevolence and of Christian self-sacrifice abound. But it may be gravely questioned whether all this vigour of service is not carried on at the cost of still more precious and essential things: whether our modern type of Christianity has root enough to bear all these blossoms without harm: whether good men commune with Christ as much as they work for Him. The stream flows broad, but what of the hidden springs which feed it? I venture to believe that one of the most needful and merciful of Christ's words to His people is the injunction, "Come ye, yourselves, apart into a lonely place, and rest awhile." And I select these words for a text, with the simple and distinctly practical purpose of urging upon them this great Christian duty of—still medi-

tation on Christ, on what He is to us, and on what we are in and by Him.

I. We have here *one great comprehensive command*—"*consider* Christ."

Now that word "consider" implies in the original an earnest, fixed, prolonged attention of mind. Our gaze upon Christ is to be like that of a man who resolutely turns away his eyes from other things, to fix them, with keen interest and eagerness, with protracted, steady look, on something which he is resolved to learn thoroughly.

The first remark that I would make then is the very simple and obvious one—that a Christian man's thoughts should be occupied with his Saviour.

Very simple and obvious no doubt—but, alas! I am afraid terribly forgotten in practice. How do you Christian people expect to get any good or blessing from Jesus Christ? Does He not work by His truth? And can that truth which sanctifies and saves, which is the weapon of the Spirit, and the medium of His grace, produce effects if it is not appropriated and digested by the meditative occupation of our minds with it? What is all the Gospel to you unless it is consciously present to your understanding, and through your understanding is ruling your affections, and moulding your will, and directing and shaping the outgoings of your life? Nothing—nothing! A man may call himself a Christian; but the measure of his Christianity is the occupation of his mind and heart with the truth as it is in Jesus.

When we "taste the good word of God" we are made partakers of "the powers of the world to come." Unless

there be that occupation of my thoughts with God's Gospel, there is no union between me and it. But the man and the word of salvation stand over against each other—there the fulness, here the emptiness; there all that I want, here I wanting it all. There is no channel by which that fulness flows into this emptiness unless our thoughts, and by means of them our whole spiritual nature, be occupied with the truth which reveals Christ, and with the Christ whom the truth reveals.

Then, that being premised, note how much practical direction as to the manner of that occupation of mind and spirit with Christ lies in that single emphatic word "*consider.*"

There is surely implied, to begin with, that such occupation must be the result of conscious *effort.* No man will keep Christ before his mind without having to make a sensible effort to turn away from the whole rabble of distracting thoughts that lie round him. In this same Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer lays it down as a condition of all persevering continuance in the race set before us that we should be "looking unto Jesus"; and he employs there a word which might be rendered, perhaps, "looking away" to Him. That conveys the same idea of rigid shutting out of other things in order that one supreme light may fill the eye and gladden the soul. If you do not carefully drop black curtains round the little chamber, and exclude all side lights, as well as all other objects from the field of vision, there will be no clear impression of the beloved face made upon the sensitive plate. It must be in the darkness that the image is transferred to the heart.

Why should Christian people expect to be able to gaze upon Him whom they have not seen, without practising that concentration and limitation which is indispensable to far lower occupations of mind? Rather, it is needed here more than anywhere else, for we have here to do with One whom no sense reveals, and whom outward things and our own sluggish earthly-mindedness are ever conspiring to thrust from our hold. No man makes progress in any branch of human thought or science without this first condition—the habit of pinning himself down wholly to the subject in hand, and rigidly restraining all wandering thoughts. You must bring your instrument to a point before it will penetrate, to an edge that it may cut—and only firm concentration of oneself on the matter before us will do that. And if that be true of regions of thought, where men willingly resort, and from which no reluctance of heart draws them back, how much more true it must be of that region to which our heavy souls are averse to rise, and whose pure keen air it is hard for our lungs to breathe? Why, you cannot even make money until, as you say, "you give your minds to business." A man sitting at a desk, cannot even add up a column of figures correctly, if he is thinking about a hundred other things. And do you think that the Divine glories of Christ are to flow into a man's soul on condition of less concentration and attention? If, on the wild stock of our sinful nature a better life has been budded, we have to take care that the energy of our souls does not waste itself in vagrant shoots, that bear only scentless, wild flowers; and that we prune close and unsparingly our

wandering thoughts, our earthly desires, else we shall bear no fragrant blossoms.

But, still further, our gaze on Him must be the look of eager interest; it must be *intense* as well as fixed.

I do not wonder at so many people thinking that there is nothing to interest them in the Gospel. There *is* nothing—and that for many reasons, and among the rest for this, that they do not come to it with awakened eagerness, with interested earnest gaze; and so, because they are careless, it is weary; because they have no hunger, it is tasteless; because they neither expect nor wish to receive anything, they go as empty as they came. To one man, looking out on the world almost as a beast might look, nothing appears wonderful, nothing great; to another, "every common sight" bears "the glory and the freshness of a dream," and seems "apparelled in celestial light." To one man, looking up with lack-lustre stolid gaze, the stars are but so many shining points, laid flat on a flat arch. To another, they are spheres immeasurable and multitudinous, set in violet depths which imagination cannot fly across, nor thought fathom. And as the earth and the heavens vary according to the eye that looks upon them, so does Christ vary. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" The careless glance sees nought even in that unparalleled sorrow—while some who gaze are bowed in grief, and some are smitten with penitence, and angels are filled with wonder. He, and His words and works, His life and death, seem to some of you familiar and commonplace—and, thank God! some of us looking on the very same facts, see in them the

very mightiest and most blessed things ever done in the world's history; and listening to the very same truths, find His lightest word weighty with inexhaustible meaning; and, gazing on the very same person in whom you see no "beauty that you should desire him," behold Him as fairer than the sons of men, and the dimmest gleam from His face as bright beyond the radiance of the noon-day sun.

On the road to Damascus the same objective phenomenon was probably presented to the senses of Saul, and of his companions. But they saw only light, while he beheld a form; they heard only a sound, he heard a voice with a meaning which smote upon his conscience, and bowed his will. We, brethren, stand together in the secret place of thunder, we stand together before the fontal source of light. Some of us hear but an inarticulate rumbling above the clouds, while others hear the very speech of God. Some of us see but a formless brightness, where others behold Him who is the master-light of all our seeing. If we would hear Christ, we must keep our ear attent unto His voice. If we would behold Him, we must gaze with reverent eagerness and fixed concentration—*setting* our thoughts on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. To superficial investigation, no treasures are disclosed; we must dig deep, if we would find the vein where the gold lies. "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

Still further, another requisite of this occupation of mind with Christ and His work may be suggested as included in the word. Our consideration must be resolute, eager; and, also—*steady* or continuous. A hurried glance is as profitless as a careless one. You do not see much on first going into a dark room out of the light; nor do you see much on first going into the light out of the dark. When a man steps for a hasty moment out of the bright sunny market-place, with all its gay colouring, into the cool, dark cathedral, he sees but dimly the still figures above the altar, and the subdued splendour of stained glass and sculptured shrines. And if he rushes back to the outside glare before his eyes become accustomed to the obscurity, he will bear away but a vague impression of confused richness, and have nothing definite to remember. No man can see the beauty of a country as he hurries through it in a train. It is only when we sit still and gaze till all the landscape sinks into our souls, and we are steeped in it, that its fairness is revealed to us.

But, alas! how little of this patient prolonged concentration of interested thought on our dear Lord, do even the best and devoutest of us employ! And as for the ordinary Christian life of this day—what a sad contrast does it present to such an ideal! It was Newton, I think, who, when asked as to his method of working in attacking complicated problems, had only the simple answer to give, "I keep it before me." Yes; that is the way to master any subject of thought. The steady gaze will, by slow degrees, see order where the random glance

saw only chaos; and the mind long familiar with a truth will have an ease and mastery in wielding it, an instinctive perception of its roots and its consequences, its relations to others, which will seem miraculous to one who has only looked upon it by snatches.

And we, dear brethren, shall never see the glory of that light which dwells between the Cherubim, if our visits to the shrine are brief and interrupted, and the bulk of our time is spent outside the tabernacle amidst the glaring sand and the blazing sunshine. The Psalmist desired to "dwell in the house of the Lord *all the days of his* life, that he might behold the beauty of the Lord"—for he knew that only such continuousness of abode would fit his eyes to see the light, and attune his ears to hear the voice of answer to him inquiring in the temple. No short swallow-flights of soul will ever carry us to the serene height where He dwells. It is the eagle, with steady unflagging flap of his broad pinion, and open-eyed gaze upwards, that rises "close to the sun, in lonely lands," and leaves all the race of short-winged and weak-sighted twitterers far below. Let us *fix* our eyes on Him—our Lord. Surely there is enough there to draw and satisfy the most prolonged eager gaze. He is our Example, our Redeemer, our Prophet. In Him we see all of God that man can apprehend, and all of man. In Him we behold our wisdom, our strength, our righteousness. We may gaze on Him with the confident look of faith, with the else hopeless look of those in whose veins is poisoned death, with the submission of obedience, with the rapture of love. And how do we look? Languidly,

carelessly, as a child does at his task, while the butterflies and the flowers in the garden draw away his wandering gaze. We think of Him by snatches. We give Him some few moments in the morning, before we are well awake perhaps; and some few moments at night, when we are almost asleep; and the day is occupied with a multitude of thoughts, which would not be much unlike what they are, if there were no Christ at all. We give Him an hour or two on a Sunday, and fancy that the manna gathered then will last all the week! Alas! alas! for the coldness, the vagrancy, and the infrequency of the thoughts which we afford to Him who ever thinks of us, and whom it is our life to know and keep in our hearts. Alas! alas! for the satire on Christian life, as we so often see it, which that exhortation and its accompanying motives contain, "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling—consider—Christ Jesus."

II. So much, then, for this one comprehensive injunction. Now, let me say a very few words as to *The great aspects of Christ's work which should fix our gaze.*

We have Himself proposed as the object of our thoughts. Not merely the truth concerning Him, but Him as brought near us by the truth. Scripture never deals with Christ's work apart from Him—the worker, nor presents Christian truth in the hard and abstract form which it must necessarily take when men begin to reflect upon it, and try to arrange their thoughts into something like order and consistency. But it by no means follows from that difference between the Bible and theological dogmas or creeds that these are unwarrantable

expansions of Christian truth. They are inevitable, they are necessary, they have their own purpose, and are good for that. But they are not the nourishment of loving devotion and living faith. The Christian contemplation of which my text speaks is the contemplation of Christ made known as the living and Divine agent of our redemption, who is our propitiation, in whom we have forgiveness through His blood, who of God is made unto us righteousness, who is our life and our hope. It is not the consideration of abstract ideas, however accurate, of atonement, forgiveness, sanctification. We need these that we may understand what Christ is; but we have to look on Him as being all these for us—and then the contemplation is joyful and fruitful.

What, then, are the aspects of the work and character of Christ which the writer here proposes for our patient gaze? There are two—consider Him as Apostle and as High Priest.

He is the "Apostle" of our profession. The application of that name to Him is startling to us, who are accustomed to apply it exclusively and almost technically to the twelve. But its use here may show, as has been observed, that those whom we call apostles were not so distinctly marked as a separate class at the date of this epistle, as they have been since. At all events, there is nothing surprising in the idea conveyed by the word. No declaration was more common on our Lord's lips when on earth than that He was "sent of God." There need then be no surprise at the thought that is here expressed. It is not only in harmony with his own words, but is

singularly appropriate and relevant to the writer's purpose in this place; for the point which he has been establishing up till now has been the superiority of the Son over all former messengers of the Divine Will, whether the prophets who received partial and progressive syllables of God's voice to speak to the fathers, or the angels who do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. All these are "ministering spirits, *sent forth* to minister": but this man is higher than the angels, inasmuch as He is the sole messenger, sent by God as none others are sent, to declare His whole name once and for all, to bring His whole love, not only to serve but to save, not only to help but to rule the sons of men, His brethren. He is sent forth from God, and brings God to us. He and He alone, He and He for ever, He and He for all is—*the* sent of God.

And our faithful and loving thoughts are to lay hold upon this aspect of His nature and work, not to tarry in the simple manhood, fair and blessed as that is, but to discern in him the complete expression of the Divine Will, the complete fulfilment of the slow marching revelations of God, the perfect, final, eternal word spoken of God among men.

Then we are to think of Him as our High Priest. "As Apostle," it has been well said, "he pleads God's cause with us: as High Priest he pleads our cause with God. The Apostolate and the Priesthood of Christ are both included in the one word—mediator." The idea of priesthood depends upon that of sacrifice, and the idea of sacrifice, as this epistle abundantly shows, is incomplete,

without that of expiation. The idea of priesthood includes that of representation, and the priestly representation of the people is incomplete, as this epistle again shows, without the presence of the priest within the vail. So, when we are bid to consider the "High Priest of our profession," our thoughts are pointed back to the one great act by which Christ "hath offered one sacrifice for sins for ever," and up to the continuous work which, with ever ready sympathy and ever prevalent intercession, He carries on in the heavens, presenting there His Eternal Sacrifice, preparing a place for us because He is there, and sending down on us the fulness of the gifts which are His that they may be ours.

The central point of our meditation and of our faith in the work of Christ is His Sacrifice and Intercession. He has come forth from the Father—His messenger to men; He has gone to the Father—our priest and forerunner with God. By both offices He completes His merciful mediation—the Christ whom it is our life and blessedness to set ever before us is the Christ who, Son of God, lived that He might declare God to men; and, Son of Man, died, that He might reconcile men to God—and Son of God, and Son of Man, ever liveth that He may pour heaven's gifts upon earth, and at last lift earth's children to heaven. "Wherefore—consider Jesus Christ, our Apostle and High Priest."

III. Notice, finally, *the Great Reasons for this occupation of Mind and Heart with Christ, our Mediator.*

These are to be found in the remaining portion of this verse. The author of the epistle does not formally

adduce them as motives, but he is in effect urging to this loving contemplation in all that he says here. The terms in which he addresses his readers, the obligations at which he points in reminding them of their profession and what it implied, and the connection which he establishes, by the "wherefore" of our text, between this practical precept, and all the preceding argument for Christ's exalted dignity—all these are meant to give force to, and converge upon, the one injunction. We may briefly indicate what seems to be the force of these reasons.

Our *relation to Christ* and the *benefit we derive from it* should impel us to loving meditation on Him. "Holy brethren." That is a very unusual phrase, and it obviously refers back to the former chapter where we read, "Both he that makes holy, and they who are made holy, are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Because, then, of the ties of brotherhood which knit us all to that dear Lord, and because He, our elder brother, sanctifies us all, should we not ever turn with loving thoughts to Him who has not been ashamed to claim kindred with us ragged prodigals, but Himself brings the best robe and puts it on us? He has brought us into the family of God. If we are His brethren, we are God's sons; He has knit us into one household. He has put the Spirit of His own Sonship into our hearts, and has sanctified us with His own imparted life. How should we not think of Him who has already done this for us! What occupation of mind can be too great, what devotion of heart can be too utter, to render to Him to whom alone we owe it, that we

are no more slaves but sons, no more bondsmen of corruption, but free and holy? We have received these gifts from Him. We continue to receive them, on condition of keeping this injunction. Gratitude should lead us to consider Him; and regard for our own continued reception of His blessings should do so too. "Consider him," because you are by His mercy holy brethren: and not less—consider Him that you may continue and increase in consciousness of brotherhood, and in fairer holiness.

Christian men, learn the means of growth in all Christian excellencies. Not by lamentations over our own deficiencies—though we need the humblest consciousness of these. Not by painful efforts after working ourselves into a happy consciousness of sonship, or after a purer life. But by forgetting all about ourselves, and occupying ourselves wholly with Jesus Christ, our Brother and our Sanctifier. The nearer we get to Him, the holier we become. The closer we press to Him, the liker Him we grow. The more we meditate on our Brother and our Lord, the more shall we be conscious that we, too, are sons of God, and brethren of the Lord. The more firmly we clasp His hand, the more abundantly will healing and energy flow from His touch into our sick impotence. Since we claim to be called holy brethren, let us never forget Him who makes us so. If we would deserve the name, let us turn away our thoughts from all else, and keep our spirits fixed upon Him. Then a great peacefulness shall rest upon our hearts, and we shall be holy as He is holy.

The *calling of which we are partakers* should impel us to loving meditation. God in Christ calls us to His service, to His love, to His heaven. That Divine calling which is addressed to us through Jesus Christ is heavenly in its origin, and heavenly in its aim. It echoes from and it summons to heaven. Of this call all Christian souls are recipients. Therefore it becomes them to set their thoughts and love on that Saviour, through whom they receive it at the first, and continue to feel its quickening impulse and its immortal hopes.

You are not true to your calling, Christian men and women, unless you "consider Christ." You will not preserve the blessed consciousness of "the great voice which says, Come up hither"—unless your thoughts are often turned to Him who has gone up on high that our hearts as well as our hopes should have a home above. If we would preserve our sense of the invitation that from heaven beckons us to heaven, and encircles us with heaven even on our journey thither—if we would continuously feel the quickening power of the hand that, laid upon our shoulders, summons us by its touch to higher and immortal life; because we are, and that we may continue to be, "partakers of the heavenly calling"—let Christ and His love fill our thoughts, and our faith and hope be fixed on Him.

Further, *the avowal which we have made* concerning Him should impel us to loving, steadfast contemplation. He is "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," or, perhaps, more accurately, "of our confession." The expression may possibly have the same ambiguity as it

has in English. We talk about "a confession of faith," meaning thereby either the act of acknowledgment or the formal document in which it is contained. But, however this may be, the substantial meaning would be conveyed if we said, "the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess." The motive that is urged in these final words, then, is just this. Such fixed, earnest, continuous contemplation of Christ is the only course that is consistent with our profession, or with the avowal that we make and the position we assume. We have professed a creed which ought to make it impossible for us to forget Him. We stand up and own Him for our Lord—do we obey Him in our lives? We profess that He is our Apostle and High Priest. Does our habitual neglect of Him not give the lie to our words? We *say:* "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father"—and before the words have died into silence, we forget Him. We *say:* "When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers"—and neither gratitude, nor wonder, nor hope are strong enough to keep His image in our treacherous hearts. We *say:* "Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father"—and our eyes are fixed on the earth at our feet, and seldom cast even a glance where He is whom we call our hope. We *say:* "We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge" —and the awful splendours of that day are too faint and far off to restrain us in sin or stimulate us to holiness. Our creed avows that Christ is everything to us. Alas! alas! how many of us proclaim in our lives that He is

nothing. If these tremendous sentences are believed at all by us, what means this languid, occasional half-hearted gaze upon Him? Surely if we believe them, we should never turn away from beholding that face, so gentle and so Divine, radiant with the brightness of God, and soft with the dewy pity of a brother and a priest!

Is your life in accordance with your confession? If not, what is the confession but a blasphemy or a hypocrisy? And what does it avail except to make the life more criminal in its forgetfulness of your Saviour? The inconsistent life silences the loudest profession, and chokes it even in the throat that utters it. It makes men begin by denying the honesty of the professor, and end by doubting the truth of the creed which he professed. Of all the enemies of the cross of Christ, none are so potent as those who, professing to be His friends, live in manifest forgetfulness of Him, His love, and His gifts, and "mind earthly things." Through such the name of Christ is blasphemed. "Wherefore, *consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our profession."

Let me end then, as I began, with an earnest appeal for more of the habit of calm, fixed meditation on the work and preciousness of our great High Priest. I would urge on you, dear brethren, and on myself, not to allow our minds and hearts to wander "after vanities, and become vain," but rigidly and watchfully to close them against the manifold distractions which in this busy age lay waste our lives. We need more—far more—still communion with our Master. For want of it our energy is feverish, our patience soon exhausted, our devotion

lacking in depth, our hopes in brightness, our whole lives in calmness. Dear brethren! by all these motives, so strongly woven together in the words of our text, and by many more, we are called to the constant effort to "set the Lord always before us," and, turning our happy thoughts to Him even in the midst of our daily duties, to "walk all the day long in the light of his countenance."

Remember that vision on the Mount of Transfiguration, and let it be ours, even in the glare of earthly joys and brightnesses, to lift up our eyes, like those wondering three, "and see no man any more, save Jesus only."—"Laying aside every weight, let us run with patience, looking" away from all beside **"unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith."**

SERMON XXI.

THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE.

MATTHEW XXVI, 50.

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?

WE are accustomed to think of the betrayer of our Lord as a kind of monster, whose crime is so mysterious in its atrocity as to put him beyond the pale of human sympathy. The awful picture which the great Italian poet draws of him as alone in hell, shunned even there, as guilty beyond all others, expresses the general feeling about him. And even the attempts which have been made to diminish the greatness of his guilt, by supposing that his motive was only to precipitate Christ's assumption of His conquering Messianic power, are prompted by the same thought that such treason as his is all but inconceivable. I cannot but think that these attempts fail, and that the narratives of the Gospels oblige us to think of his crime as deliberate treachery. But even when so regarded, other emotions than wondering loathing should be excited by the awful story.

There had been nothing in his previous history to suggest such sin, as is proved by the disciples' question,

when our Lord announced that one of them should betray him. No suspicion lighted on him—no finger pointed to where he sat. But self-distrust asked, "Lord, is it I?" and only love, pillowed on the Master's breast, and strong in the happy sense of His love, was sufficiently assured of its own constancy, to change the question into, "Lord! who is it?" The process of corruption was unseen by all eyes, but Christ's. He came to his terrible pre-eminence in crime by slow degrees, and by paths which we may all tread. As for his guilt, that is in other hands than ours. As for his fate, let us copy the solemn and pitying reticence of Peter, and say, "that he might go to *his own* place"—the place that belongs to him, and that he is fit for, wherever that may be. As for the growth and development of his sin, let us remember that "We have all of us one human heart," and that the possibilities of crime as dark are in us all. And instead of shuddering abhorrence at a sin that can scarcely be understood, and can never be repeated, let us be sure that whatever man has done, man may do, and ask with humble consciousness of our own deceitful hearts, "Lord, is it I?"

These remarkable and solemn words of Christ, with which He meets the treacherous kiss, appear to be a last appeal to Judas. They may possibly not be a question, as in our version—but an incomplete sentence, "What thou hast come to do"—leaving the implied command "that do" unexpressed. They would then be very like other words which the betrayer had heard but an hour or two before, "That thou doest, do quickly." But such a

rendering does not seem so appropriate to the circumstances as that which makes them a question, smiting on his heart and conscience, and seeking to tear away the veil of sophistications with which he had draped from his own eyes the hideous shape of his crime. And, if so, what a wonderful instance we have here of that long-suffering love. They are the last effort of the Divine patience to win back even the traitor. They show us the wrestle between the infinite mercy and the treacherous sinful heart, and they bring into awful prominence the power which that heart has of rejecting the counsel of God against itself. I venture to use them now as suggesting these three things:—the patience of Christ's love; the pleading of Christ's love; and the refusal of Christ's love.

I. *The patience of Christ's love.*

If we take no higher view of this most pathetic incident than that the words come from a man's lips, even then all its beauty will not be lost. There are some sins against friendship, in which the manner is harder to bear than the substance of the evil. It must have been a strangely mean and dastardly nature, as well as a coarse and cold one, that could think of fixing on the kiss of affection as the concerted sign to point out their victim to the legionaries. Many a man who could have planned and executed the treason would have shrunk from that. And many a man who could have borne to be betrayed by his own familiar friend would have found that heartless insult worse to endure than the treason itself. But what a picture of perfect patience and unruffled calm

we have here, in that the answer to the poisonous, hypocritical embrace was these moving words! The touch of the traitor's lips has barely left his cheek, but not one faint passing flush of anger tinges it. He is perfectly self-oblivious—absorbed in other thoughts, and among them in pity for the guilty wretch before him. His words have no agitation in them, no instinctive recoil from the pollution of such a salutation. They have grave rebuke, but it is rebuke which derives its very force from the appeal to former companionship. Christ still recognizes the ancient bond, and is true to it. He will still plead with this man who has been beside Him long; and though His heart be wounded, yet He is not wroth, and He will not cast him off. If this were nothing more than a picture of human friendship, it would stand alone, above all other records that the world cherishes in its inmost heart, of the affection that never fails, and is not soon angry.

But we, I hope, dear brethren, think more loftily and more truly of our dear Lord than as simply a perfect manhood, the exemplar of all goodness. How He comes to be that, if He be not more than that, I do not understand, and, I, for one, feel that my confidence in the flawless completeness of His human character lives or dies with my belief that He is the Eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh. Certainly we shall never truly grasp the blessed meaning of His life on earth until we look upon it all as the revelation of God. The tears of Christ are the pity of God. The gentleness of Jesus is the long-suffering of God. The tenderness of Jesus is

the love of God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" and all that life so beautiful but so anomalous as to be all but incredible, when we think of it as only the life of a man, glows with a yet fairer beauty, and corresponds with the nature which it expresses, when we think of it as being the declaration to us by the Divine Son of the Divine Father—our loftiest, clearest, and authentic revelation of God.

How that thought lifts these words before us into a still higher region! We are now in the presence of the solemn greatness of a Divine love. If the meaning of this saying is what we have suggested, it is pathetic even in the lower aspect, but how infinitely that pathos is deepened when we view it in the higher.

Surely if ever there was a man who might have been supposed to be excluded from the love of God, it was this man. Surely if ever there was a moment in a human life, when one might have supposed that even that ever open heart would shut itself together against any one, it was this moment. But no, the betrayer in the very instant of his treason has that changeless tenderness lingering around him, and that merciful hand beckoning to him still.

And have we not a right to generalize this wonderful fact, and to declare its teaching to be—that the love of God is extended to us all, and cannot be made to turn away from us by any sins of ours? Sin is mighty; it can work endless evils on us; it can disturb and embitter all our relations with God; it can, as we shall presently have to point out, make it necessary for the tenderest "grace

of God to come disciplining"—to "come with a rod," just because it comes in "the spirit of meekness." But one thing it cannot do, and that is—make God cease to love us. I suppose all human affection can be worn out by constant failure to evoke a response from cold hearts. I suppose that it can be so nipped by frosts, so constantly checked in blossoming, that it shrivels and dies. I suppose that constant ingratitude, constant indifference can turn the warmest springs of our love to a river of ice. "Can a mother forget her child?—Yea, she may forget." But we have to do with a God, whose love is His very being; who loves us not for reasons in us but in Himself; whose love is eternal and boundless as all His nature; whose love, therefore, cannot be turned away by our sin—but abides with us for ever, and is granted to every soul of man.

Dear brethren, we cannot believe too firmly, we cannot trust too absolutely, we cannot proclaim too broadly that blessed thought, without which we have no hope to feed on for ourselves, or to share with our fellows—the universal love of God in Christ.

Is there a *worst* man on earth at this moment? If there be, he, too, has a share in that love. Harlots and thieves, publicans and sinners, leprous outcasts, and souls tormented by unclean spirits, the wrecks of humanity whom decent society and respectable Christianity passes by with averted head and uplifted hands, criminals on the gibbet with the rope round their necks—and those who are hopeless as any of these, self-complacent formalists and "Gospel-hardened professors"—all have a

place in that heart. And that, not as undistinguished members of a class, but as separate souls, singly the objects of God's knowledge and love. He loves all, because He loves each. We are not massed together in His view, nor in His regard. He does not lose the details in the whole; as we, looking on some great crowd of upturned faces, are conscious of all but recognize no single one. He does not love a class—a world—but He loves the single souls that make it up—you and me, and every one of the millions that we throw together in the vague phrase, "the race." Let us individualize that love in our thoughts as it individualizes us in its outflow—and make our own the "exceeding broad" promises, which include us, too. God loves *me*; Christ gave Himself for *me*. *I* have a place in that royal, tender heart.

Nor should any sin make us doubt this. He loved us with exceeding love, even when we were "dead in trespasses." He did not begin because of anything in us, He will not cease because of anything in us. We change; He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself. As the sunshine pours down as willingly and abundantly on filth and dunghills, as on gold that glitters in its beam, and jewels that flash back its lustre, so the light and warmth of that unsetting and unexhausted source of life pours down "on the unthankful and on the good." The great ocean clasps some black and barren crag that frowns against it, as closely as with its waves it kisses some fair strand enamelled with flowers and fragrant with perfumes. So that sea of love in which we live, and move, and have our being, encircles the worst with

abundant flow. He Himself sets us the pattern, which to imitate is to be the children of "our Father which is in heaven," in that He loves His enemies, blessing them that curse, and doing good to them that hate. He Himself is what He has enjoined us to be, in that He feeds His enemies when they hunger, and when they thirst gives them drink, heaping coals of fire on their heads, and seeking to kindle in them thereby the glow of answering love, not being overcome of their evil, so that He repays hate with hate and scorn with scorn, but in patient continuance of loving kindness seeking to overcome evil with good. He is Himself that "charity" which "is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things, hopeth all things, and never faileth." His love is mightier than all our sins, and waits not on our merits, nor is turned away by our iniquities. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

II. Then, secondly, we have here—the *Pleading of Christ's Patient Love.*

I have been trying to say as broadly and strongly as I can, that our sins do not turn away the love of God in Christ from us. The more earnestly we believe and proclaim that, the more needful is it to set forth distinctly—and that not as limiting, but as explaining the truth—the other thought, that the sin which does not avert, does modify the expression of the love of God. Man's sin compels Him to do, what the prophet calls his "strange work"—the work which is not dear to His

heart, nor natural—if one may so say, to His hands—His work of judgment.

The love of Christ has to come to sinful men with patient pleading and remonstrance, that it may enter their hearts and give its blessings. Some of you may remember a modern work of art in which that long suffering appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the World stands, girded with the royal mantle clasped with the priestly breastplate, bearing in His hand the lamp of truth, and there, amidst the dew of night and the rank hemlock, He pleads for entrance at the closed door which has no handle on its outer side, and is hinged to open only from within. "I stand at the door, and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in."

And in this incident before us, we see represented not only the endless patience of God's pitying love, but the method which it needs to take in order to reach the heart.

There is an appeal to the traitor's heart, and an appeal to his conscience. Christ would have him think of the relations that have so long subsisted between them; and He would have him think, too, of the real nature of the deed he is doing, or, perhaps, of the motives that impel him. The grave sad word, by which He addresses him, is meant to smite upon his heart. The sharp question which He puts to him is meant to wake up his conscience; and both taken together represent the two chief classes of remonstrance which He brings to bear upon us all—the two great batteries from which He assails the fortress of our sins.

There is first, then—*Christ's appeal to the heart.* He tries to make him feel the considerations that should restrain him. The appellation by which our Lord addresses Judas does not in the original convey quite so strongly the idea of amity, as our word "Friend" does. It is not the same as that which He had used a few hours before in the upper chamber, when He said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends.—Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." It is the same as is put into the lips of the Lord of the vineyard, remonstrating with his jealous labourers, "Friend, I do thee no wrong." There is a tone then of less intimate association and graver rebuke in it than in that name with which He honours those who make His will heirs, and His word the law of their lives. It does not speak of close confidence, but it does suggest companionship and kindness on the part of the speaker. There is rebuke in it, but it is rebuke which derives its whole force from the remembrance of ancient concord and connection. Our Lord would recall to the memory of the betrayer the days in which they had taken sweet counsel together. It is as if he had said—"Hast thou forgotten all our former intercourse? Thou hast eaten my bread, thou hast been mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted—canst thou lift up thy heel against me?" What happy hours of quiet fellowship on many a journey, of rest together after many a day of toil, what forgotten thoughts of the loving devotion and the glow of glad consecration that He had once felt, what a long series of proofs of Christ's gentle goodness and meek

wisdom should have sprung again to remembrance at such an appeal! And how black and dastardly would his guilt have seemed if once he had ventured to remember what unexampled friendship he was sinning against!

Is it not so with us all, dear brethren? All our evils are betrayals of Christ, and all our betrayals of Christ are sins against a perfect friendship and an unvaried goodness. We, too, have sat at His table, heard His wisdom, seen His miracles, listened to His pleadings, have had a place in His heart; and if we turn away from Him to do our own pleasure, and sell His love for a handful of silver, we need not cherish shuddering abhorrence against that poor wretch who gave Him up to the cross. Oh! if we could see aright, we should see our Saviour's meek, sad face standing between us and each of our sins, with warning in the pitying eyes, and His pleading voice would sound in our ears, appealing to us by loving remembrances of His ancient friendship to turn from the evil which is treason against Him, and wounds His heart as much as it harms ours. Take heed lest in condemning the traitor we doom ourselves. If we flush into anger at the meanness of his crime, and declare, "He shall surely die," do we not hear a prophet's voice saying to each, "Thou art the man"?

The loving hand laid on the heart strings is followed by a *strong stroke on conscience.* The heart vibrates most readily in answer to gentle touches: the conscience in answer to heavier, as the breath that wakes the chords of an Æolian harp would pass silent through the brass of a trumpet. "Wherefore art thou come?"—if to be

taken as a question at all, which, as I have said, seems most natural, is either, "What hast thou come to do?"—or, "Why hast thou come to do it?" Perhaps it may be fairly taken as including both. But, at all events, it is clearly an appeal to Judas to make him see what his conduct really is in itself, and possibly in its motive too. And this is the constant effort of the love of Christ—to get us to say to ourselves the real name of what we are about.

We cloak our sins from ourselves with many wrappings, as they swathe a mummy in voluminous folds. And of these veils, one of the thickest is woven by our misuse of words to describe the very same thing by different names, according as we do it, or another man does it. Almost all moral actions—the thing to which we can apply the words right or wrong—have two or more names, of which the one suggests the better and the other the worse side of the action. For instance, what in ourselves we call prudent regard for our own interest, we call, in our neighbour, narrow selfishness; what in ourselves is laudable economy, in him is miserable avarice. We are impetuous, he is passionate; we generous, he lavish; we are clever men of business, he is a rogue; we sow our wild oats and are gay, he is dissipated. So we cheat ourselves by more than half-transparent veils of our own manufacture, which we fling round the ugly features and misshapen limbs of these sins of ours, and we are made more than ever their bond-slaves thereby.

Therefore, it is the office of the truest love to force us to look at the thing as it is. It would go some way to

keep a man from some of his sins if he would give the thing its real name. A distinct conscious statement to oneself, "now I am going to tell a lie"—"this that I am doing is fraud"—"this emotion that I feel creeping with devilish warmth about the roots of my heart is revenge"—and so on, would surely startle us sometimes, and make us fling the gliding poison from our breast, as a man would a snake that he found just lifting its head from the bosom of his robe. Suppose Judas had answered the question, and, gathering himself up, had looked his Master in the face, and said—"What have I come for?" "I have come to betray thee for thirty pieces of silver." Do you not think that putting his guilt into words might have moved even him to more salutary feelings than the remorse which afterwards accompanied his tardy discernment of what he *had* done?

So the patient love of Christ comes rebuking, and smiting hard on conscience. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared disciplining"—and His hand is never more gentle than when it plucks away the films with which we hide our sins from ourselves, and shows us the "rottenness and dead men's bones" beneath the whited walls of the sepulchres and the velvet of the coffins.

He must begin with rebukes that He may advance to blessing. He must teach us what is separating us from Him that, learning it, we may flee to His grace to help us. There is no entrance for the truest gifts of His patient love into any heart that has not yielded to His

pleading remonstrance, and in lowly penitence has answered His question as He would have us answer it, "Friend and lover of my soul! I have sinned against thy tender heart, against the unexampled patience of thy love. I have departed from thee and betrayed thee. Blessed be thy merciful voice which hath taught me what I have done! Blessed be thine unwearied goodness which still bends over me! Raise me fallen, forgive me treacherous! Keep me safe and happy, ever true and near to thee!"

III. Notice *The Possible Rejection of the Pleading of Christ's Patient Love.*

Even that appeal was vain. Here we are confronted with a plain instance of man's mysterious and awful power of "frustrating the counsel of God"—of which one knows not whether is greater, the difficulty of understanding how a finite will *can* rear itself against the infinite will, or the mournful mystery that a creature should desire to set itself against its loving maker and benefactor. But strange as it is, yet so it is; and we can turn round upon Sovereign Fatherhood bidding us to His service and say, "*I will not.*" He pleads with us, and we can resist His pleadings. He holds out the mercies of His hands and the gifts of His grace, and we can reject them. We cannot cease to be the objects of His love, but we can refuse to be the recipients of its most precious gifts. We can bar our hearts against it. Then, of what avail is it to us? To go back to an earlier illustration, the sunshine pours down and floods a world, what does that matter to us if we have fastened up

shutters on all our windows, and barred every crevice through which the streaming gladness can find its way? We shall grope at noontide as in the dark within our gloomy house, while our neighbours have light in theirs. What matters it though we float in the great ocean of the Divine Love, if with pitch and canvas we have carefully closed every aperture at which the flood can enter? A hermetically closed jar, plunged in the Atlantic, will be as dry inside as if it were lying on the sand of the desert. It is possible to perish of thirst within sight of the fountain. It is possible to separate ourselves from the love of God, not to separate the love of God from ourselves.

The incident before us carries another solemn lesson —how simple and easy a thing it is to repel that pleading love. What did Judas do? Nothing; it was enough. He merely held his peace—no more. There was no need for him to break out with oaths and curses, to reject his Lord with wild words. Silence was sufficient. And for us—no more is required. We have but to be passive; we have but to stand still. Not to accept is to refuse; non-submission is rebellion. We do not need to emphasize our refusal by any action—no need to lift our clenched hands in defiance. We have simply to put them behind our backs, or to keep them folded. The closed hand must remain an empty hand. "He that believeth not is condemned." My friend, remember that, when Christ pleads and draws, to do nothing is to oppose, and to delay is to refuse. It is a very easy matter to ruin your soul. You have simply to keep still when He says

"Come unto me"—to keep your eyes fixed where they were, when He says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." And all the rest will follow of itself.

Notice, too, how the appeal of Christ's love hardens where it does not soften. That gentle voice drove the traitor nearer the verge over which he fell into a gulf of despair. It should have drawn him closer to the Lord, but he recoiled from it, and was thereby brought nearer destruction. Every pleading of Christ's grace, whether by providences, or by books, or by His own word, does something with us. It is never vain. Either it melts or it hardens. The sun either scatters the summer morning mists, or it rolls them into heavier folds, from whose livid depths the lightning is flashing by mid-day. You cannot come near the most inadequate exhibition of the pardoning love of Christ without being either drawn closer to Him or driven further from Him. Each act of rejection prepares the way for another, which will be easier, and adds another film to the darkness which covers your eyes, another layer to the hardness which encrusts your hearts.

Again, that silence, so eloquent and potent in its influence, was probably the silence of a man whose conscience was convicted while his will was unchanged. Such a condition is possible. It points to solemn thoughts, and to deep mysteries in man's awful nature. He knew that he was wrong, he had no excuse, his deed was before him in some measure in its true character, and yet he would not give it up. Such a state, if constant and complete, presents the most frightful picture we can frame of a soul. That a man shall not be able to say, "I did it ignorantly";

that Christ shall not be able to ground his intercession on, "They know not what they do"; that with full knowledge of the true nature of the deed, there shall be no wavering of the determination to do it; we may well turn with terror from such an awful abyss. But let us remember that, whether such a condition in its completeness is conceivable or not, at all events we may approach it indefinitely; and we do approach it by every sin, and by every refusal to yield to the love that would touch our consciences and fill our hearts.

Have you ever noticed what a remarkable verbal correspondence there is between these words of our text, and some other very solemn ones of Christ's? The question that He puts into the lips of the king who came in to see his guests is "*Friend, how camest thou* in hither, not having on a wedding garment?" The question asked on earth shall be repeated again at last. The silence which indicated a convinced conscience and an unchanged will may indicate at that day both of these and hopelessness beside.

And the clear vision of the Divine love, if it do not flood the heart with joy and evoke the bliss of answering love, may fill it with bitterness. It is possible that the same revelation of the same grace may be the heaven of heaven to those who welcome it, and the pain of hell to those who turn from it. It is possible that love believed and received may be life, and love recognized and rejected may be death. It is possible that the vision of the same face may make some break forth with the rapturous hymn, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him!"

and make others call on the hills to fall on them and cover them from its brightness.

But let us not end with such words. Rather, dear brethren, let us yield to His patient beseechings; let Him teach us our evil and our sin. Listen to His great love who invites us to plead, and promises to pardon—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

SERMON XXII.

SOLDIER PRIESTS.

PSALM CX, 3.

Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

IT is no part of my present purpose to establish the reference of this Psalm to our Lord. We have Christ's own authority for that.

It does not seem to be typical—that is to say, it does not appear to have had a lower application to a King of Israel who was a shadow of the true monarch, but rather to refer only to the coming Sovereign, whom David was helped to discern, indeed, by his own regal office, but whose office and character, as here set forth, far surpass anything belonging to him or to his dynasty. The attributes of the King, the union in His case of the royal and priestly dignities, His seat at the right hand of God, His acknowledged supremacy over the greatest Jewish ruler, who here calls Him "my Lord," His eternal dominion, His conquest of many nations, and His lifting up of His head in triumphant rule that knows no end—

all these characteristics seem to forbid the possibility of a double reference, and to demand the acknowledgment of a distinct and exclusive prophecy of Christ.

Taking that for granted without more words, it strikes one as remarkable that this description of the subjects of the Priest-King should be thus imbedded in the very heart of the grand portraiture of the monarch Himself. It is the anticipation of the profound New Testament thought of the unity of Christ and His church. By simple faith a union is brought about so close and intimate that all His is theirs, and the picture of His glory is incomplete without the vision of "the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Therefore, between the word of God which elevates Him to His right hand, and the oath of God which consecrates Him a priest for ever, is this description of the army of the King.

The full force of the words will, I hope, appear as we advance. For the present it will be enough to say that there are really in our text three co-ordinate clauses, all descriptive of the subjects of the monarch, regarded as a band of warriors—and that the main ideas are these: the subjects are willing soldiers; the soldiers are priests; the priest-soldiers are as dew upon the earth. Or, in other words, we have here the very heart of the Christian character set forth as being willing consecration; then we have the work which Christian men have to do, and the spirit in which they are to do it, expressed in that metaphor of their priestly attire; and then we have their refreshing and quickening influence upon the world.

I. *The subjects of the Priest-King are willing soldiers.*

In accordance with the warlike tone of the whole Psalm, our text describes the subjects as an army. That military metaphor comes out more clearly when we attach the true meaning to the words, "in the day of thy power." The word rendered, and rightly rendered, "power," has the same ambiguity which that word has in the English of the date of our translation, and for a century later, as you may find in Shakespeare and Milton, who both used it in the sense of "army." Singularly enough we do not employ "powers" in that meaning, but we do another word which means the same thing—and talk of "forces," meaning thereby "troops." By the way, what a melancholy sign it is of the predominance of that infernal military spirit, that it should have so leavened language, that the "forces" of a nation means its soldiers, its embattled energies turned to the work of destruction. But the phrase is so used here. "The day of thy power" is not a mere synonym for "the time of thy might," but means specifically "the day of thine army," that is, "the day when thou dost muster thy forces and set them in array for the war."

The King is going forth to conquest. But He goes not alone. Behind Him comes His faithful followers, all pressing on with willing hearts and high courage. Then, to begin with, the warfare which He wages is one not confined to Him. Alone He offers the sacrifice which He atones; but, as we shall see, we too are priests. He rules, and His servants rule with Him. But ere that time comes, they are to be joined with Him in the great war-

fare by which He wins the earth for Himself. "As Captain of the Lord's host am I now come." He wins no conquests for Himself; and now that He is exalted at God's right hand, He wins none by Himself. We have to do His work, we have to fight His battles as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. By power derived from Him, but wielded by ourselves; with courage inspired by Him, but filling our hearts; not as though He needed us, but, inasmuch as He is pleased to use us, we have to wage warfare for and to please Him who hath chosen us to be soldiers. The Captain of our Salvation sits at the right hand of God, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. He has bidden us to keep the field and fight the fight. From His height He watches the conflict—nay, He is with us while we wage it. So long as we strike for Him, so long is it His power that teaches our hands to war. Our King's flag is committed to our care; but we are not left to defend it alone. In indissoluble unity, the King and the subjects, the Chief and His vassals, the Captain and His soldiers, are knit together—and wheresoever His people are, in all the danger and hardships of the long struggle, there is He, to keep their heads in the day of battle, and make them more than conquerors.

Then, again, that warfare is shared in by all the subjects. It is a levy *en masse*—an armed nation. The whole of the people are embodied for the battle. It is not the work of a select few, but of every one who calls Christ Lord, to be His faithful servant and soldier. Whatever varieties of occupation may be set us by Him, one purpose is to be kept in view and one end to be effected by

them all. Every Christian man is bound to strive for the reduction of all human hearts under Christ's dominion. The tasks may be different, but the result should be one. Some of us have to toil in the trenches, some of us to guard the camp, some to lead the assault, some to stay by the stuff and keep the communications open. Be it so. We are all soldiers, and He only has to determine our work. We are responsible for the spirit of it, He for its success.

Again, there are no *mercenaries* in these ranks, no pressed men. The soldiers are all volunteers. "Thy people shall be willing." Pause for a moment upon that thought.

Dear brethren, there are two kinds of submission and service. There is submission because you cannot help it, and there is submission because you like it. There is a sullen bowing down beneath the weight of a hand which you are too feeble to resist, and there is a glad surrender to a love which it would be a pain not to obey. Some of us feel that we are shut in by immense and sovereign power which we cannot oppose. And yet, like some raging rebel in a dungeon, or some fluttering bird in a cage, we beat ourselves all bruised and bloody against the bars in vain attempts at liberty, alternating with fits of cowed apathy as we slink into a corner of our cell. Some of us, thank God! feel that we are enclosed on every side by that mighty hand which none can resist, and from which we would not stray if we could, and we joyfully hide beneath its shelter, and gladly obey when it points. The constrained obedience is no obedience.

Unless there be the glad surrender of the will and heart, there is no surrender at all. God does not want compulsory submission. He does not care to rule over people who are only crushed down by greater power. He does not count that those serve who sullenly acquiesce because they dare not oppose. Christ seeks for no pressed men in His ranks. Whosoever does not enlist joyfully is not reckoned as His. And the question comes to us, brethren—what is my relation to that loving Lord, to that redeemer King? Do I submit because His love has won my heart, and it would be a pang not to serve Him; or, do I submit because I know Him strong, and am afraid to refuse? If the former, all is well; He calls us not servants, but friends. If the latter, all is wrong; we are not subjects, but enemies.

There is another idea involved in this description. The soldiers are not only marked by glad obedience, but that obedience rests upon the sacrifice of themselves. The word here rendered "willing" is employed throughout the Levitical law for "freewill offerings." And if we may venture to bring that reference in here, it carries us a step farther in this characterization of the army. This glad submission comes from self-consecration and surrender. It is in that host as it was in the army whose heroic self-devotion was chaunted by Deborah under her palm tree. "The people willingly offered themselves." Hence came courage, devotion, victory. With their lives in their hands they flung themselves on the foe, and nothing could stand against the onset of men who recked not of themselves. There is one grand thing even about the

devilry of war—the transcendent self-abnegation with which, however poor and unworthy may be the cause, a man casts himself away, "what time the foeman's line is broke." The poorest, vulgarest, most animal natures rise for a moment into something like nobility, as the surge of the strong emotion lifts them to that height of heroism. Life is then most glorious when it is given away for a great cause. That sacrifice is the one noble and chivalrous element which gives interest to war—the one thing that can be disentangled from its hideous associations, and can be transferred to higher regions of life. That spirit of lofty consecration and utter self-forgetfulness must be ours, if we would be Christ's soldiers. Our obedience will then be glad when we feel the force of, and yield to, that gentle persuasive entreaty, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." There is one sacrifice for sin for ever—which never can be repeated, nor exhausted, nor copied. And the loving faithful acceptance of that sacrifice of propitiation leads our hearts to the response of thank-offering, the sacrifice and surrender of ourselves to Him who has given Himself not only to, but for us. It cannot be recompensed, but it may be acknowledged. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for He has died for us. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for only in such surrender do we truly find ourselves. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for such a sacrifice makes all life fair and noble, and that altar sanctifies the gift. Let us give ourselves to Christ, for without such sacrifice we have no place in the host whom He leads to victory.

"Thy people shall be willing offerings in the day of thy power."

Still further, another remarkable idea may be connected with this word. By a natural transition, of which illustrations may be found in other languages, it comes to mean "*free*," and also "*noble*." As, for instance, it is used in the fifty-first Psalm, "Uphold me with thy *free* spirit"—and in the forty-seventh, "The *princes* of the people are gathered together." And does not this shading of significations—willing, sacrifices, free, princely—remind us of another distinctly evangelical principle, that the willing service which rests upon glad consecration raises him who renders it to true freedom and dominion? Every man enlisted in His body-guard is noble. The Prince's servants are every other person's master. The King's livery exempts from all other submission. As in the old Saxon monarchies, the monarch's domestics were nobles, the men of Christ's household are ennobled by their service. They who obey Him are free from every yoke of bondage—"free indeed." All things serve the soul that serves Christ. "He hath made us kings unto God."

II. *The Soldiers are Priests.*

That expression, "in the beauties of holiness," is usually read as if it belonged either to the words immediately preceding, or to those immediately following. But in either case the connection is somewhat difficult and obscure. It seems better regarded as a distinct and separate clause, adding a fresh trait to the description of the army. And what that is we need not

find any difficulty in ascertaining. "The beauties of holiness" is a frequent phrase for the sacerdotal garments, the holy festal attire of the priests of the Lord. So considered, how beautifully it comes in here. The conquering King whom the Psalm hymns is a Priest for ever; and He is followed by an army of priests. The soldiers are gathered in the day of the muster, with high courage and willing devotion, ready to fling away their lives; but they are clad not in mail, but in priestly robes—like those who wait before the altar rather than like those who plunge into the fight—like those who compassed Jericho with the ark for their standard, and the trumpets for all their weapons. We can scarcely fail to remember the words which echo these and interpret them. "The armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean"—a strange armour against sword-cut and spear-thrust.

The main purpose, then, of this part of our text seems to be to bring out the priestly character of the Christian soldier—a thought which carries with it many important considerations, on which I can barely touch.

Mark, then, how the welfare which we have to wage is the same as the priestly service which we have to render. The conflict is with our own sin and evil; the sacrifice we have to offer is ourselves. As soldiers, we have to fight against our selfish desires and manifold imperfections; as priests, we have to lay our whole being on His altar. The task is the same under either emblem. And we have a conflict to wage in the world, and in the world we have a priestly work to do, and these are the same.

We have to be God's representatives in the world, bringing Him nearer to men's apprehensions and hearts by word and work. We have to bring men to God by entreaty, and by showing the path which leads to Him. That priestly service for men is in effect identical with the merciful warfare which we have to wage in the world. The church militant is an army of priests. Its warfare is its sacerdotal function. It fights for Christ when it opposes the message of His grace and the power of His blood to its own and the world's sins—and when it intercedes in the secret place for the coming of His kingdom.

Does not this metaphor teach us also, what is to be our defence and our weapon in this warfare? Not with garments rolled in blood, nor with brazen armour do they go forth, who follow Him that conquered by dying. Their uniform is the beauties of holiness, "the fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints." Many great thoughts lie in such words, which I must pass over. But this one thing is obvious—that the great power which we, Christian men, are to wield in our loving warfare is—*character*. Purity of heart and life, transparent simple goodness, manifest in men's sight—these will arm us against dangers, and these will bring our brethren glad captives to our Lord. We serve Him best, and advance His kingdom most, when the habit of our souls is that righteousness with which He invests our nakedness. Be like your Lord, and as His soldiers you will conquer, and as His priests you will win some to His love and fear. Nothing else will avail without that. Without that dress no man finds a place in the ranks.

The image suggests, too, the spirit in which our priestly warfare is to be waged. The one metaphor brings with it thoughts of strenuous effort, of discipline, of sworn consecration to a cause. The other brings with it thoughts of gentleness, and sympathy, and tenderness, of still waiting at the shrine, of communion with Him who dwells between the Cherubim. And whilst our work demands all the courage and tension of every power which the one image presents, it is to be sedulously guarded from any tinge of wrath or heat of passion, such as mingles with conflict, and is to be prosecuted with all the pity and patience, the brotherly meekness of a true priest. "The wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God." If we forget the one character in the other we shall bring weakness into our warfare, and pollution into our sacrifice. "The servant of the Lord must not strive." We must not be animated by mere pugnacious desire to advance our principles, nor let the heat of human eagerness give a false fervour to our words and work. We cannot scold nor dragoon men to love Jesus Christ. We cannot drive them into the fold with dogs and sticks. We are to be gentle, long-suffering, not doing our work with passion and self-will, but remembering that gentleness is mightiest, and that we shall best adorn the doctrine of God our Savour when we go among men with the light caught in the inner sanctuary still irradiating our faces, and our hands full of blessings to bestow on our brethren. We are to be soldier-priests, strong and gentle, like the ideal of those knights of old who were both, and bore the cross on shield and helmet and sword-hilt.

He, our Lord, is our pattern for both; and from Him we derive the strength for each. He is the Captain of our Salvation, and we fight beneath His banner, and by His strength. He is a merciful and faithful High Priest, and He consecrates His brethren to the service of the sanctuary. To Him look for your example of heroism, of fortitude, of self-forgetfulness. To Him look for your example of gentle patience and dewy pity. Learn in Christ how possible it is to be strong and mild, to blend in fullest harmony the perfection of all that is noble, lofty, generous in the soldier's ardour of heroic devotion; and of all that is calm, still, compassionate, tender in the priest's waiting before God and mediation among men. And, remember, that by faith only do we gain the power of copying that blessed example, to be like which is to be perfect—not to be like which is to fail wholly, and to prove that we have no part in His sacrifice, nor any share in His victory.

III. The final point in this description must now engage us for a few moments. *The Soldier-Priests are as dew upon the earth.*

"From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." These words are often misunderstood, and taken to be a description of the fresh, youthful energy attributed by the Psalm to the Priest-King of this nation of soldier-priests. The misunderstanding, I suppose, has led to the common phrase, "The dew of one's youth." But the reference of the expression is to the army, not to its leader. "Youth" here is a collective noun, equivalent to "young men." The host of His soldier-subjects is

described as a band of young warriors, whom He leads, in their fresh strength and countless numbers and gleaming beauty, like the dew of the morning.

There are two points in this last clause which may occupy us for a few moments—that picture of the army as a band of youthful warriors; and that lovely emblem of the dew as applied to Christ's servants.

As to the former—there are many other words of Scripture which carry the same thought, that he who has fellowship with God, and lives in the constant reception of the supernatural life and grace which come from Jesus Christ, possesses the secret of perpetual youth. The world ages us, time and physical changes tell on us all, and the strength which belongs to the life of nature ebbs away—but the life eternal is subject to no laws of decay, and owes nothing to the external world. So we may be ever young in heart and spirit. It is possible for a man to carry the freshness, the buoyancy, the elastic cheerfulness, the joyful hope of his earliest days, right on through the monotony of middle aged maturity, and even into old age shadowed by the lovely reflection of the tombs which the setting sun casts over the path. It is possible for us to get younger as we get older, because we drink more full draughts of the fountain of life: and so to have to say at the last, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." If we live near Christ, and draw our life from Him, then we may blend the hopes of youth with the experience and memory of age; be at once

calm and joyous, wise and strong, preserving the blessedness of each stage of life into that which follows, and thus at last possessing the sweetness and the good of all at once. We may not only bear fruit in old age, but have blossoms, fruit, and flowers—the varying product and adornment of every stage of life united in our characters.

Then, with regard to the other point in this final clause —that emblem of the dew leads to many considerations which I can but inadequately touch upon.

It comes into view here, I suppose, mainly for the sake of its effect upon the earth. It is as a symbol of the refreshing which a weary world will receive from the conquests and presence of the King and His host, that they are likened to the glittering morning dew. Another prophetic Scripture gives us the same emblem when it speaks of Israel being "in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord." Such ought to be the effect of our presence. We are meant to gladden, to adorn, to refresh this parched, prosaic world, with a freshness brought from the chambers of the sunrise.

It is worth while to notice how we may discern a sequence of thought in these successive features of the description in our text. It began with that inmost spirit and motive of the Christian life, the submission of will and consecration of self to Christ. It advanced to the function and character of His servants in the world. And now it deals finally with the influence which they are to exert by this their soldier-like obedience and priestly ministration.

There is progress of thought, too, in another way. We

began with a symbol that had in it something almost harsh and stern. We advanced to one in which there was a predominance of gentle and gracious thoughts and images. And now all that was severe, and all that reminded either of opposition or of effort, has melted away into this sweet emblem. Instead of the "confused noise" of the battle of the warrior, we have the silence of the dawn, and the noiseless falling of the dew amid the solitudes of the wildernesses, or the recesses of the mountains. So the highest thought of our Christian influence, is that it comes with silent footfall and refreshes men's souls—like His, who shall come down as rain upon the mown grass, who will not strive nor cry—but in gentle omnipotence and meek persistence of love, will not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth.

Remember other symbols by which the same general thought of Christian influence upon the world is set forth with very remarkable variation. "Ye are the light of the world."—"Ye are the salt of the earth." The light guides and gladdens; the salt preserves and purifies; the dew freshens and fertilizes. The light, conspicuous; the salt, working concealed; and the dew, visible like the former, but yet unobtrusive and operating silently like the latter. Some of us had rather be light than salt; prefer to be conspicuous rather than to diffuse a wholesome silent influence around us. But these three types must all be blended both in regard to the manner of working and in regard to the effects produced. We shall refresh and beautify the world only in proportion as we save it from

its rottenness and corruption, and we shall do either only in proportion as we bear abroad the name of Christ, in whom is "life; and the life is the light of men."

Nor need we omit allusions to other associations connected with this figure. The dew, formed in the silence of the darkness while men sleep, falling as willingly on a bit of dead wood as anywhere, hanging its pearls on every poor spike of grass, and dressing everything on which it lies with strange beauty, each separate globule tiny and evanescent, but each flashing back the light, and each a perfect sphere, feeble one by one, but united mighty to make the pastures of the wilderness rejoice—so, created in silence by an unseen influence, feeble when taken in detail but strong in their myriads, glad to occupy the lowliest place, and each "bright with something of celestial light," Christian men and women are to be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.

Brethren, that characteristic, like all else which is good, belongs to us in proportion as we keep near to Christ Jesus, and are filled with His fulness. All these emblems which have been occupying us now, originally belonged to Him, and we receive from Him the grace that makes us as He is in the world. He Himself is the Warrior King, the Captain of the Lord's host, the true Joshua, whose last word ere His cross was a shout of victory, "I have overcome the world"—whose promises from the throne seven times crown the conqueror who overcomes as He overcame. He makes us His soldiers and strengthens us for the war, if we live by faith in Him. He Himself is the Priest—the only eternal Priest of the world—

who wears on His head the mitre and the diadem, and bears in His hand the sceptre and the censer; and He makes us priests, if faith in His only sacrifice and all prevalent intercession be in our souls. He is the dew unto Israel—and only by intercourse with Him shall we be made gentle and refreshing, silent blessings to all the weary and the parched souls in the wilderness of the world.

Everything worth being or doing comes from Jesus Christ. Heroic courage! Then hold His hand, and He will strengthen your heart. Glad surrender! Then think of His sacrifice for us until ours to Him be our answering gift. Priestly power! Then let Him bring us nigh by His blood that we too may be able to have compassion on the ignorant and to draw them to God. Dewy purity and freshness! Then open your hearts for the reception of His grace, for all the invigoration that we can impart to the world is but the communication of that refreshing wherewith we ourselves are refreshed of Christ. In every aspect of our relations to the world, we draw all our fitness for all our offices from that Lord, who is and gives everything that we can be or do. Then let us seek by humble faith and habitual contact with Him and His truth, to have our emptiness filled by His fulness, and our unfitness made ready for all service by His all sufficiency.

And let me close by reiterating what I have said already. There is a twofold manner of subjection—the spurious and the real. The involuntary is nought. The glad and cheerful surrender alone is counted submission. This Psalm shows us Christ surrounded by His friends who are

glad to obey. But it also shows us Christ ruling in the midst of His enemies. They cannot help obeying; His dominion is established over them. But they do not wish to have Him to reign over them, and therefore they are enemies—even though they be subjects. Which is it with you, my brother? Do you serve because you love—and love because He died for you? or do you serve because you must? Then, remember, constrained service is no service; and subjects without loyalty are rebel traitors. Our Psalm shows us Christ gathering His army in array. He is calling each of us to a place there, in this day of His power, and day of His grace. Take heed lest the day of His power should for you darken into that other day of which this Psalm speaks—the day of His wrath, when He strikes through kings, and bruises the head over many countries. Put your trust in that Saviour, my friend, cleave to that sacrifice, then you will not be amongst those whom He treads down in His march to victory, but one of that happy band of priestly warriors who follow Him as He goes forth conquering and to conquer.

SERMON XXIII.

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION.

Acts i, 21, 22.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

THE fact of Christ's resurrection was the staple of the first Christian sermon recorded in this Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

They did not deal so much in doctrine; they did not dwell very distinctly upon what we call, and rightly call, the atoning death of Christ; but they proclaimed what they had seen with their eyes—that he died and rose again.

And the resurrection was not only the main subject of their teaching, but it was the resurrection in one of its aspects and for one specific purpose. There are, speaking roughly, three main connections in which the fact of Christ's rising from the dead is viewed in Scripture; and these three emerge upon the consciousness of the early church successively.

It was, first, a fact affecting Him, a testimony concern

ing Him, carrying with it necessarily some great truths with regard to Him, His character, His nature, and His work. And it was in that aspect mainly that the earliest preachers dealt with it. Then, as reflection and the guidance of God's good Spirit led them to understand more and more of the treasure which lay in the fact, it came to be to them, next, a pattern, and a pledge, and a prophecy of their own resurrection. The doctrine of man's immortality and the future life was evolved from it, and was felt to be implied in it. And then it came to be, thirdly and lastly, a symbol or figure of the spiritual resurrection and newness of life into which all they were born who participated in His death. They knew Him first by His resurrection; they then knew the power of His resurrection as a witness for their own; and they knew it as being the pattern to which they were to be conformed even whilst here on earth!

The words which I have read for my text are the Apostle Peter's own description of what was the office of an apostle—"to be a witness with us of Christ's resurrection." And the statement branches out, I think, into three considerations, to which I ask your attention for a few moments this morning. First, we have here the witnesses; secondly, we have the sufficiency of their testimony; and, thirdly, we have the importance of the fact to which they bear their witness. We are testimony-bearers. Our witness is enough to establish the fact. The fact to which we witness is all important for the religion and the hopes of the world.

I. First, then, *the Witnesses.*

Here we have the "head of the Apostolic College," the "primate" of the twelve, on whose supposed primacy—which is certainly not a "rock"—such tremendous claims have been built, laying down the qualifications and the functions of an apostle. How simply they present themselves to his mind. The qualifications are only personal knowledge of Jesus Christ in His earthly history, because the function is only to attest His resurrection. Their work was to bear witness to what they had seen with their eyes; and what was needed, therefore, was nothing more than such familiarity with Christ as should make them competent witnesses to the fact that He died, and to the fact that the same Jesus who had died, and whom they knew so well, rose again and went up to heaven.

The same conception of an Apostle's work lies in Christ's last solemn designation of them for their office, where their whole commission is included in the simple words, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." It appears again and again in the earlier address reported in this book. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." "Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses." "With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection." "We are His witnesses of these things." To Cornelius, Peter speaks of the Apostles as "witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead"—and whose charge, received from Christ, was "to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." Paul at Antioch speaks of the twelve, from whom he distinguishes himself, as being

"Christ's witnesses to *the people*"—and seems to regard them as specially commissioned to the Jewish nation, while he was sent to "declare unto you"—Gentiles—the same "glad tidings," in that "God had raised up Jesus again." So we might go on accumulating passages, but these will suffice.

I need not spend time in elaborating or emphasizing the contrast which the idea of the apostolic office contained in these simple words presents to the portentous theories of later times. I need only remind you that, according to the Gospels, the work of the apostles in Christ's life-time embraced three elements, none of which were peculiar to them—to be with Christ, to preach, and to work miracles; that their characteristic work after His ascension was this of witness bearing; that the church did not owe to them as a body its extension, nor Christian doctrine its form; that whilst Peter and James and John appear in the history, and Matthew wrote a Gospel, and the other James and Jude are probably the authors of the brief Epistles which bear their names—the rest of the twelve never appear in the subsequent history. This book is not the Acts of the Apostles. It tells the work of Peter alone among the twelve. The Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the Cypriote Barnabas, and the man of Tarsus—greater than they all—these spread the name of Christ beyond the limits of the Holy City and the chosen people. The solemn power of "binding and loosing" was not a prerogative of the twelve, for we read that Jesus came where "the *disciples* were assembled," and that "the *disciples* were glad when they saw the Lord"; and "He

breathed on *them*, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted."

Where in all this is there a trace of the special apostolic powers which have been alleged to be transmitted from them? Nowhere. Who was it that came and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me that thou mightest be filled with the Holy Ghost"? A simple "layman." Who was it that stood by, a passive and astonished spectator of the communication of spiritual gifts to Gentile converts, and could only say, "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift, as he did unto us, what was I that I could withstand God"? Peter, the leader of the twelve.

Their task was apparently a humbler, really a far more important one. Their place was apparently a lowlier, really a loftier one. They had to lay broad and deep the basis for all the growth and grace of the church in the facts which they witnessed. Their work abides; and when the Celestial City is revealed to our longing hearts, in *its* foundations will be read "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." Their office was testimony; and their testimony was to this effect—"Hearken, we twelve men knew this Jesus. Some of us knew Him when He was a boy, and lived beside that little village where He was born. We were with Him for three whole years in close contact day and night. We all of us, though we were cowards, stood afar off with a handful of women when He was crucified. We saw Him dead. We saw His grave. We saw Him living, and we touched Him, and handled Him, and He ate and drank with us, and we, sinners that we are that tell it you, we went out with Him

to the top of Olivet, and we saw Him go up into the skies. Do you believe us or do you not? We do not come in the first place to preach doctrines. We are not thinkers or moralists. We are plain men, telling a plain story, to the truth of which we pledge our senses. We do not want compliments about our spiritual elevation, or our pure morality. We do not want reverence as possessors of mysterious and exclusive powers. We want you to believe us as honest men, relating what we have seen. There are twelve of us, and there are five hundred at our back, and we have all got the one simple story to tell. It is, indeed, a Gospel, a philosophy, a theology, the reconciliation of earth and heaven, the revelation of God to man, and of man to himself, the unveiling of the future world, the basis of hope; but we bring it to you first as a thing that happened upon this earth of ours, which we saw with our eyes, and of which we are the witnesses!"

To that work there can be no successors. Some of them were inspired to be the writers of the authoritative fountains of religious truth; but that gift did not belong to them all, and was not the distinctive possession of the twelve. The power of working miracles, and of communicating supernatural gifts was not confined to them, but is found exercised by other believers, as well as by a whole "presbytery." And as for what was properly their task, and their qualifications, there can be no succession, for there is nothing to succeed to, but what cannot be transmitted—the sight of the risen Saviour, and the witness to His resurrection as a fact certified by their senses.

II. *The sufficiency of the testimony.*

Peter regards (as does the whole New Testament, and as did Peter's Master, when He appointed these men) the witness which he and his fellows bore as enough to lay firm and deep the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The first point that I would suggest here is this: if we think of Christianity as being mainly a set of truths—spiritual, moral, intellectual—then, of course, the way to prove Christianity is to show the consistency of that body of truths with one another, their consistency with other truths, their derivation from admitted principles, their reasonableness, their adaptation to men's nature, and the refining and elevating effects of their adoption, and so on. If we think of Christianity, on the other hand, as being first a set of historical facts which carry the doctrines, then the way to prove Christianity is not to show how reasonable it is, not to show how it has been anticipated and expected and desired, not to show how it corresponds with men's needs and men's longings, not to show what large and blessed results follow from its acceptance. All these are legitimate ways of establishing principles; but the way to establish a fact is only one—that is, to find somebody that can say, "I know it, for I saw it."

And my belief is that the course of modern "apologetics," as they are called—methods of defending Christianity—has followed too slavishly the devious course of modern antagonism, and has departed from its real stronghold when it has consented to argue the question

on these (as I take them to be) lower and less sufficing grounds. I am thankful to adopt all that wise Christian apologists may have said in regard to the reasonableness of Christianity; its correspondence with men's wants, and the blessings that follow from it, and so forth; but the Gospel is first and foremost a history, and you cannot prove that a thing has happened by showing how very desirable it is that it should happen, how reasonable it is to expect that it should happen, what good results would follow from believing that it has happened—all that is irrelevant. Think of it as first a history, and then you are shut up to the old-fashioned line of evidence, irrefragable as I take it to be, to which all these others may afterwards be appended as confirmatory. It is true, because sufficient eye-witnesses assert it. It did happen, because it is commended to us by the ordinary canons of evidence which we accept in regard to all other matters of fact!

With regard to the sufficiency of the specific evidence here, I wish to make only one or two observations.

Suppose you yield up everything that the most craving and unreasonable modern scepticism can demand about the date and authorship of these tracts that make the New Testament, we have still left four letters of the Apostle Paul, which nobody has ever denied, which the very extremest professors of the "higher criticism" themselves accept. These four are the Epistles to the Romans, the first and second to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians. The dates which are assigned to these four letters by anybody, believer or unbeliever, bring them

within five and twenty years of the alleged date of Christ's resurrection.

Then, what do we find in these undeniably and admittedly genuine letters a quarter of a century after the supposed fact? We find in all of them reference to it—the distinct allegation of it. We find in one of them that the apostle states it as being the substance of his preaching and of his brethren's preaching, that "Christ died and rose again according to the Scriptures," and that He was seen by individuals, by multitudes, by a whole five hundred, the greater portion of whom were living and available as witnesses when he wrote.

And we find that side by side with this statement, there is the reference to his own vision of the risen Saviour, which carries us up within ten years of the alleged fact. So, then, by the evidence of admittedly genuine documents, which are dealing with the state of things ten years after the supposed resurrection, there was a unanimous concurrence of belief, on the part of the whole primitive church, so that even the heretics who said that there was no resurrection of the dead could be argued with on the ground of their belief in Christ's resurrection. The whole church with one voice asserted it. And there were hundreds of living men ready to attest it. It was not a handful of women who fancied they had seen Him once, very early in dim twilight of a spring morning—but it was half a thousand that had beheld Him. He had been seen by them not once, but often; not far off, but close at hand; not in one place, but in Galilee and Jerusalem; not under one set of circum-

stances, but at all hours of the day, abroad and in the house, walking and sitting, speaking and eating, by them singly and in numbers. He had not been seen only by excited expectants of His appearance, but by incredulous eyes and surprised hearts, who doubted ere they worshipped, and paused before they said, "My Lord and my God." They neither hoped that he would rise, nor believed that He had risen; and the world may be thankful that they were slow of heart to believe.

Would not the testimony which can be alleged for Christ's resurrection be enough to guarantee any event but this? And if so, why is not it enough to guarantee this, too? If, as nobody denies, the early church, within ten years of Christ's resurrection, believed in His resurrection, and were ready to go, and did, many of them, go to the death in assertion of their veracity in declaring it, then one of two things—Either they were right or they were wrong; and if the latter, one of two things—If the resurrection be not a fact, then that belief was either a delusion or a deceit.

Not a delusion, for such an illusion is altogether unexampled; and it is absurd to think of it as being shared by a multitude like the early church. Nations have said, "Our king is not dead—he is gone away and he will come back." Loving disciples have said, "Our teacher lives in solitude, and will return to us." But this is no parallel to these. This is not a fond imagination giving an apparent substance to its own creation, but sense recognizing first the fact, "He *is* dead," and then, in opposition to expectation, and when hope had sickened to despair,

recognizing the astounding fact, "He liveth that was dead." And to suppose that that should have been the rooted conviction of hundreds of men that were not idiots finds no parallel in the history of human illusions, and no analogy in such legends as those to which I have referred.

Not a myth; for a myth does not grow in ten years. And there was no motive to frame if Christ was dead and all was over. Not a deceit. For the character of the men, and the character of the associated morality, and the obvious absence of all self-interest, and the persecutions and sorrows which they endured, make it inconceivable that the fairest building that ever hath been reared in the world, and which is cemented by men's blood, should be built upon the mud and slime of a conscious deceit!

And all this we are asked to put aside at the bidding of a glaring begging of the whole question, and an outrageous assertion which no man that believes in a God at all can logically maintain, viz., that no testimony can reach to the miraculous, or that miracles are impossible.

No testimony reach to the miraculous! Well, put it into a concrete form. Can testimony not reach to this: I know, because I saw, that a man was dead; I know, because I saw, a dead man live again? If testimony can do that, I think we may safely leave the verbal sophism that it cannot reach to the miraculous to take care of itself.

And, then, with regard to the other — miracle is impossible. That is an illogical begging of the whole question in dispute — it cannot avail to brush aside

testimony. You cannot smother facts by theories in that fashion. Again, one would like to know how it comes that our modern men of science, who protest so much against science being corrupted by metaphysics, should commit themselves to an assertion like that? Surely that is stark, staring metaphysics. It seems as if they thought that the "metaphysics" which said that there was anything behind the physical universe was unscientific; but that the metaphysics which said that there was nothing behind physics was quite legitimate, and ought to be allowed to pass muster. What have the votaries of pure physical science, who hold the barren word-contests of theology and the proud pretensions of philosophy in such contempt, to do out-Heroding Herod in that fashion, and venturing on metaphysical assertions of such a sort? Let them keep to their own line, and tell us all that crucibles and scalpels can reveal, and we will listen as becomes us. But when they contradict their own principles in order to deny the possibility of miracle, we need only give them back their own words, and ask that the investigation of facts shall not be hampered and clogged with metaphysical prejudices. No! no! Christ made no mistake when He built His Church upon that rock—the historical evidence of a resurrection from the dead, though all the wise men of Areopagus' hill may make its cliffs ring with mocking laughter when we say, upon Easter morning, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

III. There is a final consideration connected with these words, which I must deal with very briefly—*the importance of the fact* which is thus borne witness to.

I have already pointed out that the resurrection of Christ is viewed in Scripture in three aspects, in its bearing upon His nature and work, as a pattern for our future, and as a symbol of our present newness of life. The importance to which I refer now applies only to that first aspect.

With the resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the Divinity of Christ. As Paul said, in that letter to which I have referred, "Declared to be the Son of God, with power by the resurrection from the dead." As Peter said in the sermon that follows this in our text, "God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." As Paul said, on Mars' Hill, "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The case is this. Christ lived as we know, and in the course of that life claimed to be the Son of God. He made such broad and strange assertions as these—"I and my Father are one." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." "I am the resurrection and the life." "He that believeth on me shall never die." "The Son of man must suffer many things—and the third day he shall rise again." Thus speaking He dies, and rises again and passes into the heavens. That is the last mightiest utterance of the same testimony, which spake from heaven on His baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." If He be risen from the dead, then His loftiest claims are confirmed from the throne, and we can see in Him—the Son of God. But if death holds Him still, and the Syrian stars look down upon His

grave as a modern poet tells us in his dainty English they do, then what becomes of these words of His, and of our estimate of the character of Him, the speaker? Let us hear no more about the pure morality of Jesus Christ, and the beauty of His calm and lofty teaching, and the rest of it. Take away the resurrection from the dead, and we have left beautiful precepts, and fair wisdom deformed with a monstrous self-assertion, and the constant reiteration of claims which the event proves to have been baseless. Either He has risen from the dead or His words were blasphemy. Men now-a-days talk very lightly of throwing aside the supernatural portions of the Gospel history, and retaining reverence for the great Teacher, the pure moralist of Nazareth. The Pharisees put the issue more coarsely and truly when they said, "That deceiver said, while He was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." Yes! one or the other. "Declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead," or—that which our lips refuse to say even in a hypothesis!

Still further, with the resurrection stands or falls Christ's *whole work for our redemption.* If He died, like other men—if that awful bony hand has got its grip upon Him too, then we have no proof that the cross was anything but a martyr's cross. His resurrection is the proof of His completed work of redemption. It is the proof—followed as it is by His ascension—that His death was not the tribute which for Himself He had to pay, but the ransom for us. His resurrection is the condition of His present activity. If He has not risen, He has not put

away sin; and if He has not put it away by the sacrifice of Himself, none has, and it remains. We come back to the old dreary alternative: if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, and our preaching is vain. Ye are yet in your sins, and they which have fallen asleep in Christ with unfulfilled hopes fixed upon a baseless vision—they of whom we hoped, through our tears, that they live with Him—they are perished.

For, if He be not risen, there is no resurrection; and, if He be not risen, there is no forgiveness; and, if He be not risen, there is no Son of God; and the world is desolate, and the heaven is empty, and the grave is dark, and sin abides, and death is eternal. If Christ be dead, then that awful vision is true, "As I looked up into the immeasurable heavens for the Divine Eye, it froze me with an empty bottomless eye-socket."

There is nothing between us and darkness, despair, death, but that ancient message, "I declare unto you the gospel which I preach, by which ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures."

Well, then, may we take up the ancient glad salutation, "The Lord is risen;" and, turning from these thoughts of the disaster and despair that that awful supposition drags after it, fall back upon the sober certainty, and with the apostle break forth in triumph, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

SERMON XXIV.

NEAREST TO CHRIST.

MATTHEW xx, 23.

To sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

YOU will observe that an unusually long supplement is inserted by our translators in this verse. That supplement is quite unnecessary, and, as is sometimes the case, is even worse than unnecessary. It positively obscures the true meaning of the words before us.

As they stand in our Bibles, the impression that they leave upon one's mind is that Christ in them abjures the power of giving to His disciples their places in the kingdom of heaven, and declares that it belongs not to His function, but relegates it, to His own exclusion, to the Father: whereas what He says is the very opposite of this. He does not put aside the granting of places at His right hand or His left as not being within His province, but He states the principles and conditions on which He does make such a grant; and so is really claiming it as His province. All that would have been a great deal clearer if our translators had been contented

to render the words that they found before them in the Book, without addition, and to read, "To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

Another introductory remark may be made to the effect that our Lord does not put aside this prayer of His apostles as if they were seeking an impossible thing. It is never safe, I know, to argue from the silence of Scripture. There may be many reasons for that silence beyond our ken in any given case; but still it does strike one as noteworthy, that, when this fond mother and her ambitious sons came with their prayer for pre-eminence in His kingdom, our Lord did not answer what would have been so obvious to answer if it had been true, "You are asking a thing which cannot be granted to anybody, for they be all upon one level in that kingdom of the heavens." He says by implication the very opposite. Not only does His silence confirm their belief that when He came in His glory, some would be closer to His side than others; but the plain statement of the text is that, in the depth of the eternal counsels, and by the preparation of Divine grace, there were thrones nearest to His own which some men should fill. He does *not* say: "You are asking what cannot be." He does say: "There are men for whom it is prepared of my Father."

And then, still further, He does not condemn the prayer as indicating a wrong state of mind on the part of James and John, though good and bad were strangely mingled in it. We are told now-a-days that it is a very selfish thing, far below the lofty height to which our

transcendental teachers have attained, to be heartened and encouraged, strengthened and quickened, by the prospect of the crown and the rest that remain for the people of God! And, if so, Christ ought to have turned round to these men, and have rebuked the passion for reward, which, according to this new light, is so unworthy and so low. But, instead of that, He confines Himself to explaining the conditions on which the desire is possible, and by implication permits and approves the desire. You want to sit on my right hand and on my left, do you? Then be it so. You may have it if you like. Are you ready to accept the conditions? It is well that you should want it,—not for the sake of being above your brethren, but for the sake of being nearest to Me. Hearken! "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" "They say unto him" (and I do not know that there are anywhere grander words than the calm, swift, unhesitating, modest, and yet confident answer of these two men) "we are able." You shall have your desire if you fulfil the conditions. It is given to them "for whom it is prepared of my Father."

I. So, then, if we rightly understand these words, and take them without the unfortunate comment which our translators have inserted, they contain, first, the principle that *some will be nearer Christ than others in that heavenly kingdom.*

As I have said, the words of our Lord do not merely imply, by the absence of all hint that these men's petition was impossible, the existence of degrees among the subjects of His heavenly kingdom, but articulately

affirm that such variety is provided for by the preparation of the Father. Probably the two brothers thought that they were only asking for pre-eminence in an earthly kingdom, and had no idea that their prayer pointed beyond the grave; but that confusion of thought could not be cured in their then stage of growth, and our Lord therefore leaves it untouched. But the other error, if it were an error, was of a different kind, and might, for aught that one sees, have been set right in a moment. Instead of which the answer adopts it, and seems to set Christ's own confirmation on it, as being no Jewish dream, but a truth.

They were asking for earth. He answers—for heaven. He leaves them to learn in after days—when the one was slain with the sword, first martyr among the apostles, and the other lived to see them all pass to their thrones, while he remained the "companion in tribulation" of the second generation of the Church—how far off was the fulfilment which they fancied so near.

We need not be surprised that so large a truth should be spoken by Christ so quietly, and as it were incidentally. For that is in keeping with His whole tone when speaking of the unseen world. One knows not whether to wonder more at the decisive authority with which He tells us of that mysterious region, or at the small space which such revelations occupy in His words. There is an air of simplicity and unconsciousness, and withal of authority, and withal of Divine reticence about them all, which are in full harmony with the belief that Christ speaking of heaven speaks of that He knows, and testifies that He hath seen.

That truth, to which, as we think, our Lord's words here inevitably lead, is distinctly taught in many other places of Scripture. We should have had less difficulty about it, and should have felt more what a solemn and stimulating thought it is, if we had tried a little more than most of us do, to keep clear before us what really is the essential of that future life, what is the lustre of its light, the heaven of heaven, the glory of the glory.

Men talk about physical theories of another life. I suppose they are possible. They seem to me infinitely unimportant. Warm imaginations, working by sense, write books about a future state which wonderfully succeed in making it real by making it earthly. Some of them read more like a book of travels in this world than forecastings of the next. They may be true or not. It does not matter one whit. I believe that heaven is a place. I believe that the corporeity of our future life is essential to the perfection of it. I believe that Christ wears and will wear for ever a human frame. I believe that that involves locality, circumstance, external occupations; and I say, all that being so, and in its own place very important, yet if we stop there, we have no vision of the real light that makes the lustre, no true idea of the glory that makes the blessedness.

For what is heaven? Likeness to God! Love, purity, fellowship with Him; the condition of the spirit and the relation of the soul to Him. The noblest truth about the future world flows from the words of our Master—"This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Not, "this brings;" not,

"this will lead up to;" not, "this will draw after it;" but, "this is;" and whosoever possesses that eternal life hath already in him the germ of all the glories that are round the throne, and the blessedness that fills the hearts of perfected spirits.

If so, if already eternal life in the bud standeth in the knowledge of God in Christ, what makes its fruitage and completeness? Surely, not physical changes or the circumstances of heaven, at least not these primarily, however much such changes and circumstances may subserve our blessedness there, and the anticipation of them may help our sense-bound hopes here. But the completion of heaven is the completion of our knowledge of God and Christ, with all the perfecting of spirit which that implies and produces. The faith, and love, and happy obedience, and consecration which is calm, that partially occupied and ruled the soul here are to be thought of as enlarged, perfected, delivered from the interruption of opposing thoughts, of sensuous desires, of selfish purposes, of earthly and sinful occupations. And that perfect knowledge and perfect union and perfect likeness are perfect bliss. And that bliss is heaven. And if, whilst heaven is a place, the heaven of heaven be a state, then no more words are needed to show that, then, heaven can be no dead level, nor can all stand at the same stage of attainments, though all be perfect; but that in that solemn company of the blessed, "the spirits of just men made perfect," there are indefinitely numerous degrees of approximation to the unattainable perfection, which stretches above them all, and draws them all to

itself. We have not to think of that future life as oppressed, if I may so say, with the unbroken monotony of perfect identity in character and attainments. All indeed are like one another, because all are like Jesus, but that basis of similarity does not exclude infinite variety. The same glory belongs to each, but reflected at differing angles and received in divers measures. Perfect blessedness belongs to each, but the capacity to receive may differ. The same crown on each head, the same song on each lip, the same fulness of joy filling each heart; but star differeth from star, and the great condition of happy intercourse on earth shall not be wanting in heaven—a deep-seated similarity and a superficial diversity.

Does not the very idea of an endless progress in that kingdom involve that variety in degree? We do not think of men passing into the heavens, and being perfected by a bound so as there shall be no growth. We think of them indeed as being perfected up to the height of their then capacity, from the beginning of that celestial life, so as that there shall be no sin, nor any conscious incompleteness, but not so as there shall be no progress. And, if they each grow through all the ages, and are ever coming nearer and nearer to Christ, that seems necessarily to lead to the thought that this endless progress, carried on in every spirit, places them at different points of approximation to the one centre. As in the heavens there be planets that roll nearer and nearer the central sun, and others that circle farther out from its rays, yet each keeps its course, and makes music as it moves, as well as planets whose broader disc can receive and reflect

more of the light than the smaller sister spheres, and yet each blazes over its whole surface, and is full to its very rim with white light; so round *that* throne the spirits of the just made perfect shall circle in order and peace—every one blessed, every one perfect, every one like Christ to begin with, and becoming liker through every moment of the eternities. Each perfected soul looking in his brother's shall see there another phase of the one perfectness that blesses and adorns him too, and all taken together shall make up, in so far as finite creatures can make up, the reflection and manifestation of the fulness of Christ. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" is the law for the incompleteness of earth. "Having then gifts differing according to the glory that is given to us" will be the law for the perfection of the heavens. There are those for whom it is prepared of His Father, that they shall sit in special nearness to Him.

II. Still further, these words rightly understood assert that truth, which, at first sight, our English rendering seems to make them contradict, viz., that *Christ is the giver to each of these various degrees of glory and blessedness.*

"It is not mine to give save to them for whom it is prepared." Then it is thine to give it to them!

To deny or to doubt that Christ is the giver of the blessedness, whatsoever the blessedness may be, that fills the hearts and souls of the redeemed is to destroy His whole work, to destroy all the relations upon which our hopes rest, and to introduce confusion and contradiction into the whole matter!

For Scripture teaches us that He is God's unspeakable gift; that in Him is given to us everything; that He is

the bestower of all which we need; that out of His fulness, as one of those two men said, all we have received, and grace for grace. There is nothing within the compass of God's love to bestow of which Christ is not the giver. There is nothing Divine that is done in the heavens and the earth, I believe, of which Christ is not the doer. The representation of Scripture is uniformly that He is the activity of the Divine nature; that He is the energy of the Divine will; that He is, to use the metaphor of the Old Testament, "the arm of the Lord"—the forthputting of God's power; that He is, to use the profound expression of the New Testament, the *word* of the Lord, cognate with, and the utterance of the eternal nature; the light that streams from the central brightness, the river that flows from the else sealed fountain. As the arm is to the body and as is the word to the soul, so is Christ to God—the eternal Divine utterance and manifestation of the Divine nature. And, therefore, to talk about anything that a man can need and anything that God can give as not being given by Christ, is to strike at the very foundation, not only of our hopes, but at the whole scheme of revealed truth. He is the giver of heaven and everything else the soul requires.

And then, again, let me remind you that on this matter we are not left to such general considerations as those that I have been suggesting, but that the plain statements of Scripture do confirm the assertion that Christ is the determiner and the bestower of all the differing grades of glory and blessedness yonder. For, do we not read of Him that He is the Judge of the whole earth? Do we

not read of Him that His word is acquittal and His frown condemnation—that to be accepted of Him is the highest aim and end of the Christian life? Do we not read that it is He that says: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you?" Do we not read that the apostle, dying, solaced himself with the thought that "there was laid up for him a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at that day?" And do we not read in the very last book of Scripture, written by one of those two brothers, and containing almost verbal reference to the words of my text, the promise seven times from the immortal lips of the glorified Son of Man, walking in the midst of the candlesticks, "To him that overcometh will I give?" The fruit of the tree of life is plucked by His hands for the wearied conquerors. The crown of life is given by Him to the faithful witnesses. The hidden manna and the new name are bestowed by Him on those who hold fast His name. It is He who gives the victors kingly power over the nations. He clothes in white garments those who have not defiled their robes. His hand writes upon the triumphant foreheads the name of God. And highest of all, beyond which there is no bliss conceivable, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."

Christ is the bestower of the royalties of the heavens as of the redemptions of the earth, and it is His to give that which we crave at His hands, when we ask pardon here and glory hereafter. "To him that is athirst will he give of the water of life freely," and to him that overcometh will He give the crown of glory.

III. These words lead us, in the third place, to the further thought, that *these glorious places are not given to mere wishing, nor by mere arbitrary will.*

"You would sit on my right hand and on my left?" "You think of that pre-eminence as conferred because you chose to ask it—as given by a piece of favouritism. Not so. I cannot make a man foremost in my kingdom in that fashion. There are conditions which must precede such an elevation."

And there are plenty of people who think thus still, as if the mere desire, without anything more, were enough—or, as if the felicities of the heavenly world were dependent solely on Christ's arbitrary will, and could be bestowed by an exercise of mere power, as an eastern prince may make this man his vizier and that other one his water carrier. The same principles which we have already applied to the elucidation of the idea of varieties and stages of nearness to Christ in His heavenly kingdom have a bearing on this matter. If we rightly understand that the essential blessedness of heaven is likeness to Christ, we shall feel that mere wishing carries no man thither, and that mere sovereign will and power do not avail to set us there. There are conditions indispensable, from the very nature of the case, and unless they be realized it is impossible for us to receive, as for Him to give, a place at His side. If, indeed, all that future blessedness consisted in mere external circumstances and happier conditions of life, it might be so bestowed. But if place and surroundings, and a more exquisite and ethereal frame are but subordinate sources of it, and its real fountain is union with Jesus and assimilation to Him, then something else

than idle desires must wing the soul that soars thither, and His transforming grace, not His arbitrary will, must set us at His own right hand "in the heavenly places."

Of all the profitless occupations with which men waste their lives, none are more utterly useless than wishing without acting. Our wishes are meant to impel us to the appropriate forms of energy by which they can be realized. When a pauper becomes a millionaire by sitting and vehemently wishing that he were rich, when ignorance becomes learning by standing in a library and wishing that the contents of all these books were in its head, there will be some hope that the gates of heaven will fly open to your desire. But till then, "many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and not be able." Many shall *seek:* do you *strive.* For wishing is one thing, and *willing* is another, and *doing* is yet another. And in regard to entrance into Christ's kingdom our "doing" is trusting in Him who has done all for us. "This is the work of God that ye should believe on him whom he hath sent." Does our wish lead us to the acceptance of the condition? Then it will be fulfilled. If not, it will remain fruitless, will die into apathy, or will live as a pang and a curse.

You wish, or fancy you wish, to pass into heaven when you die, I suppose. Some of its characteristics attract you. You believe in punishment for sin, and you would willingly escape that. You believe in a place of rest after toil, of happiness after sorrow, where nipping frosts of disappointment, and wild blasts of calamity, and slow gnawing decay no more harm and kill your joys—and you would like that. But do you wish to be pure and

stainless, to have your hearts fixed on God alone, to have your whole being filled with Him, and emptied of self and sense and sin. The peace of heaven attracts you—but its praise repels, does it not? The happiness draws your wishes—does the holiness seem inviting? It would be joyful to be far away from punishment—would it be as joyful to be near Christ? Ah! no; the wishes lead to no resolve, and therefore to no result, for this among other reasons, because they are only kindled by a part of the whole, and are exchanged for positive aversion when the real heaven of heaven is presented to your thoughts. Many a man who, by the set of his whole life, is drifting daily nearer and nearer that region of outer darkness, is conscious of the idle wish for peace and joy beyond the grave. In common matters a man may be devoured with vain desires all his life-time, because he will not pass beyond wishing to acting accordingly. "The desire of the slothful killeth him, because his hands refused to labour; he coveteth greedily all the day long." And with like but infinitely more tragical issues do these vain wishes for a place in that calm world, where nothing but holiness enters, gnaw at many a soul. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," was the aspiration of that Gentile prophet, whose love of the world obscured even the prophetic illumination which he possessed—and his epitaph is a stern comment on the uselessness of such empty wishes, "Balaam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." It needs more than a wish to sit at Christ's right hand in His kingdom.

Nor can such a place be given by mere arbitrary will

Christ could not, if he would, take a man to His right hand whose heart was not the home of simple trust and thankful love, whose nature and desires were unprepared for that blessed world. It would be like taking one of those creatures—if there be such—that live on the planet whose orbit is farthest from the sun, accustomed to cold, organized for darkness, and carrying it to that great central blaze, with all its fierce flames and tongues of fiery gas that shoot up a thousand miles in a moment. It would crumble and disappear before its blackness could be seen against the blaze.

His loving will embraces us all, and is the foundation of all our hopes. But it had to reach its purpose by a bitter road which He did not shrink from travelling. He desires to save us, and to realize the desire He had to die. "It became him for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." What He had to do, we have to accept. Unless we accept the mercy of God in Christ, no wish on our parts, nor any exercise of power on His, will carry us to the heaven which He has died to open, and of which He is at once the giver and the gift.

IV. *These glorious places are given as the result of a Divine preparation.*

"To them for whom it is prepared of my Father." We have seen that Christ is not to be regarded as abjuring the office, with which His disciples' confidence led them to invest Him—that of allotting to His servants their place in His kingdom. He neither refers it to the Father without Himself, nor claims it for Himself without the Father. The living unity of will and work which subsists between

the Father and the Son forbids such a separation and distribution of office. And that unity is set forth on both its sides in His own deep words, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for whatsoever things he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

So, then, while the gift of thrones at His side is His act and the Father's, in like manner the preparation of the royal seats for their occupants, and of the kings for their thrones, is the Father's act and His.

Our text does not tell us directly what that preparation is, any more than it tells us directly what the principles are on which entrance into and pre-eminence in the kingdom are granted. But we know enough in regard to both, for our practical guidance, for the vigour of our hope, and the grasp of our faith.

There is a twofold Divine preparation of the heavens for men. One is from of old. The kingdom is "prepared for you before the foundation of the world." That preparation is the eternal counsel of the Divine love, which calleth the things that are not as though they were, and before which all that is evolved in the generations of men and the epochs of time, lies on one plane, equally near to Him from whose throne diverge far beneath the triple streams of past, present, and future.

And beside that preparation, the counsel of pardoning mercy and redeeming grace, there is the other preparation —the realization of that eternal purpose in time through the work of Jesus Christ, our Lord. His consolation to His disciples in the parting hour was, "I go to prepare a place for you." How much was included in these words

we shall never know till we, like Him, see of the travail of His soul, and like Him are satisfied. But we can dimly see that on the one hand His death, and on the other hand His entrance into that holiest of all, make ready for us the many mansions of the Father's house. He was crucified for our offences, He was raised again for our justification. He is passed through the heavens to stand our forerunner in the presence of God—and by all these mighty acts He prepares the heavenly places for us. As the sun behind a cloud, which hides it from us, is still pouring out its rays on far off lands, so He, veiled in dark sunset clouds of Calvary, sent the energy of His passion and cross into the unseen world and made it possible that we should enter there. "When thou didst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the gates of the kingdom of heaven to all believers." As one who precedes a mighty host, provides and prepares rest for their weariness, and food for their hunger, in some city on their line of march, and having made all things ready, is at the gates to welcome their travel-stained ranks when they arrive, and guide them to their repose; so He has gone before, our forerunner, to order all things for us there. It may be that unless Christ were in heaven, our brother as well as our Lord, it were no place for mortals. It may be that we need to have His glorified bodily presence in order that it should be possible for human spirits to bear the light, and be at home with God. Be that as it may, this we know, that the Father prepares a place for us by the eternal counsel of His love, and by the all sufficient work of Christ, by whom we have access to the Father.

And as His work is the Father's preparation of the place for us by the Son, the issue of His work is the Father's preparation of us for the place, through the Son, by the Spirit. "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God."

If so, then what follows? This, among other things. Wishes are vain. Heaven is no gift of arbitrary favouritism. But faith in Christ, and faith alone, leads us to His right hand—and the measure of our faith and growing Christlikeness here will be the measure of our glory hereafter, and of our nearness to Him. It is possible to be "saved, *yet so as by fire.*" It is possible to have "an entrance ministered unto us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." If we would be near Him then, we must be near Him now. If we would share His throne, we must bear the cross. If we would be found in the likeness of His resurrection, we must be "conformable unto his death." Then such desires as these true-hearted, and yet mistaken, disciples expressed will not be selfish ambition, but dependent love. They will not be vain wishes—but accepted by Him, who, stooping from amid the royalties of heaven, with love upon His face and pity in His heart, will give more than we ask. "Seekest thou a place at my right hand? Nay, I give thee a more wondrous dignity. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."